

Lalitha Kala Tarangini

Premier Quarterly Music Magazine from
Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira

Volume 2022, Issue 2

June 2022

Karukurichi
P Arunachalam



Special Edition on Nagaswaram and Taval Stalwarts

Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina for Jayanthi Kumaresh

The title "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina" was presented
to Veena Jayanthi Kumaresh in the divine presence of
"H H Sri Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar" on 05 May 2022.

The title carries a purse of Rs. One Lakh, a silver medal and a citation. This award is
instituted in memory of our visionary founder Shri. G Vedantha Iyengar who started
the institution 67 years ago.



Standing Left to Right - Smt. Smt. Rajashree Yogananda - Vice President, SRLKM, Shri. GV Krishna Prasad, Honorary Secretary, SRLKM, Vid.
Kumaresh, Shri HR Yathiraj, President, SRLKM, Smt. Mahalakshmi Yathiraj

June 2022

'Nagaswaram', sometimes popularly called 'Nadaswaram' is one of the oldest musical instruments known to mankind. It is considered to be a very auspicious instrument (Mangala Vaadyam in Tamil). Taval, the percussion instrument that accompanies the Nagaswaram is synonymous with Nagaswaram. By tradition, no Wedding or Upanayanam is complete without Nagaswaram. In temples, Nagaswaram is part and parcel of the rituals and has a distinct role to play in the proceedings of the rituals. We dedicate this edition of the Lalitha Kala Tarangini to all mahanubhavas who glorified Nagaswaram and Taval.

Bharatavarsha has given birth to countless great Nagaswaram and Taval vidwans over the last few centuries. Dr. BM Sundaram, an authority on the subject in his book 'Mangala Isai Mannargal' has unearthed many such hidden gems and today this book is considered to be a go-to book on the subject. While it is practically impossible to cover everything in one edition, we have covered a few of the great artistes who have made an impact. We hope to cover more such mahanubhavas in future editions. We are grateful to Dr. BM Sundaram for supporting us on this important edition.

We are very fortunate to get some time off from HH Sri Sri Jeeyar Swamiji of Yathiraja Mutt, Melukote. In a rare interview with 'Lalitha Kala Tarangini', Swamiji

shares his passion for music and also discusses a close relationship between music, the bhakti movement, and the temple traditions. Jeeyar Swamiji distinguishes himself as a rare 'matadipathi' with a high understanding of Karnatic classical music.

SRLKM annual music festival was conducted after a gap of two years and it was well-received by the audience. Jayanthi Kumaresh was bestowed with the prestigious honour 'Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina'.

regards,
Anand S

Contributors: KS Kalidas, Dr. BM Sundaram, M Ravindra Narayanan and P Sridharan, Shailesh Ramamurthy, Rajani Arjun Shankar, C Ramakrishnan, Ranjini Govind (The Hindu).

Translation Credit: Sudha Balachandran, Rajani Arjun Shankar

Photo Courtesy: Personal collections of TR Govindarajan, Courtesy the book Voices within written by Bombay Jayashree and TM Krishna, Paniraj, Courtesy 'The Hindu', Personal collections of Dr. BM Sundaram, Courtesy Yadugiri Yathiraja Mutt, Personal collections of Mysore Subramanya, Personal collections of Jayanthi Kumaresh.

Front Cover - An artists depiction of Karukurichi Parunachalam (source not available)

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (SRLKM) founded by Shri G Vedanta Iyengar in the year 1955 is rendering yeomen service in the field of music. In addition to music classes, music concerts are held all through the year. The significant festivals are Sankranti and Spring music festivals. Mandira also takes pride in conducting music awareness program, music workshops, Lecture demonstrations etc. Entry to all program conducted by the Mandira is free as the aim of the institution is to enable everyone to listen to the best of the music and to propagate Karnatic Classical Music.

"Lalitha Kala Tarangini" publication is fostered by Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, disseminates knowledge in the area of Karnataka Classical Music and bring to light talent and excellence in this area. We believe this is just another step towards preserving and promoting this great Indian fine art.

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Printed and published by GV Krishna Prasad on behalf of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, CA No. 28, 9th Main Road, Near Banashankari II Stage Post office, Banashankari II Stage, Bangalore 560070, Karnataka, India.

Lalitha Kala Tarangini

Inbox

A Life worth living,

Dear Sir,

To say in one word about the articles sketching the exemplary personality of Sri G.Vedanta Iyengar, it is DIVINE. (LKT, February 2022 special edition on Shri.Vedanta Iyengar)

My eyes swelled up with tears of joy and sorrow. Joy yes, because we are fortunate enough to know this much about this Great Soul in the least. Sorrow, because it is nearly impossible to find anyone these days who can even compare with such a life of seem-less virtues.

My sincere praNams to you for bringing out this invaluable treasure.

Vidushi Dr.TS Satyavathy, Bangalore

Dear Sri. Krishnaprasad and Sri.Anand,

While reading the cover story on Sri. G. Vedanta Iyengar, the spirit and soul behind the phenomenon we know as SRLKM, I realised that something as monumental as your great institution cannot be built by merely ambition. It calls for divine inspiration.

A middle-class family devoted to education and arts has striven to create something extraordinary.

Without political power, commercial alliances, and hands in public pockets through contacts, you have invested your money, your hard-work and your passion in SRLKM.

You have exemplified what Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita:

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा ।

तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशसम्भवम् ॥ १०-४१॥

It is only Bhagavan's grace that has filled you all with samskaras, energy and fortitude to give so much to all of us, to the artistes, and to future generations.

A big thank you to SRLKM.

Yours,

Sachi R. Sachidananda

We are very pleased and thankful to our readers for overwhelmingly appreciating the special edition on our visionary founder Shri. Vedanta Iyengar. Many of them have expressed that it was indeed heartening to learn and know about the noble personality who scarified everything and spread the music to our society.

-Editor

Acknowledgements

SRLKM would like to thank Dr. BM Sundaram, Musicologist for supporting us on our special edition of 'Lalitha Kala Tarangini' dedicated to 'Nagaswaram and Taval Vidwans'. Dr. BM Sundaram has decades of research work experience on this subject and his father is the legendary Taval player Meenakshisundaram Pillai.

We are thankful to Lalithjaram Ramachandran, author and the one who spearheaded a documentation effort on the Saivaite Nagaswara Temple tradition in the form of a DVD titled 'Nadamum Nathanum'.

We acknowledge with thanks the content and pictures of Karukurichi P Arunachalam from the book "Ninrolirum Minnal – Karukurichi P Arunachalam" compiled by Sri N. A. S. Sivakumar, 'Atsharam Padippagam' (Aksharam Press), Kovilpatti.

We are extremely grateful to two ladies, Sudha Balachandran of Bangalore and Rajani Arjun Shankar of Chennai who helped us with translations at short notice and turned them around in 24 hours.

As always we are extremely thankful to all the contributors for their efforts and photographs making this edition very engrossing.

- Editor



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His Holiness Sri Sri Jeevar Swamiji of Yathiraja Mutt, Melukote addressing the gathering during the SRLKM award function on 08 May 2022. From Left to Right - Shri. GV Krishnaprasad, Hon. Secretary SRLKM, Jayanthi Kumaresh, Kumaresh, Shri HR Yathiraj, President, SRLKM.

Nagaswaram - The ‘Raja Vadyam’

Shailesh Ramamurthy, Bangalore

विविधोत्सव - मूर्ति -यात्रया
समपुष्पन् विशिखाः परां श्रियम् ।
वहति स्म सुधा-तरङ्गिणी
निभ-नागस्वर-गान-माधुरी ॥

The streets were beautiful with many processional gods, and the sweetness of Nagaswara music flowed like a river of nectar

- Verse from ‘Sri Muthuswami Dikshita Charita Kavyam’ authored by Dr V Raghavan. This verse describes the Tiruvarur Vasantotsava

Nagaswaram (more commonly called Nadaswaram) immediately brings to mind, a feeling of auspiciousness that it psychologically heralds. Indeed, the Nagaswaram and its rhythmic percussive companion, ‘Tavil (Thavil) also called Dolu’ are referred to as *Mangala Nagaswaram Vadyams* (musical instruments that augur auspiciousness, we may add - through their rich melodic and rhythmic content). While Nagaswaram and temple festivities are inseparable on one hand, the role of Nagaswaram as an inseparable companion to vedic chants has been experienced by everyone at their homes’ joyous functions.

A double-reed wind instrument, which requires arduous practice to play melodiously and tune-fully, Nagaswaram is associated with music that is magnificent and intense in its volume, emotional impact and appeal. The main body of the instrument is made of wood from the tree of *Hardwickia Binata* known as *Aacha* tree (Tamil), known for its dense and water-resistant quality. The lower part of the instrument which flares outwards like a bell, was earlier rosewood based, and now, typically uses *Vaagai* (*Albizia Lebbeck*) tree. A naturally occurring reed called *Korukku Thatti* is fashioned, by means of an elaborate process, into the *Seevali* through which

the player blows into the instrument. The instrument typically features seven finger-holes and additional holes towards the bottom for specific tonal control. The versatility of the instrument, making it verily a *Raja Vaadyam* (royal instrument), is due to the myriad musical flavours made possible by the synergistic combination of blowing and fingering. While fingering techniques allow for rich musical movements over the instrument’s nominal range of two and a half octaves, the *Seevali* reed’s sensitivity to changes in blowing pressure provides additional pitch variation possibilities (in a relatively narrower band) enabling the production of microtones that lie between the nominal pitches of notes associated with individual tone-holes. The resulting smoothness, speed, dynamics, volume, vibrato and overall richness in *Sangeeta bhaava*, provide this instrument a very unique character and royal personality.

Practitioners until the early part of the twentieth century used a higher pitch (shorter in length, including a pitch of G (5 kattai), for their instruments. Current practitioners use a lower pitch of D(2) or D# (2.5). The *Baari* Nagaswaram design of a pitch of around D(2), along with a design which allows for pitch precision of the *suddha madhyamam* note, is credited to the collaborative work of maestro Sri TN Rajarathnam Pillai and Sri Ranganatha Achari.

The first few strains of beautiful Nagaswaram music can verily confer instant joy and bliss to the listener.

Among the various musical instruments that are God’s gift to our country, Nagaswaram as well as the Veena, in their (almost) present forms, have a relatively longer history of about half a millennium in shaping classical music of South India. (These instruments of course can be

credited with a much longer history, if their predecessors in evolution are considered musically). Accordingly, generations of musicians of Nagaswaram and Veena have enhanced the musical repertoire as well as the instrumental techniques towards heights of aesthetic refinement of classical music of South India.

In this regard, the Nagaswaram has its own repertoire not only in the realm of performed Carnatic music as understood today, but also specific codified repertoire associated with some of the main temples of Tamil-Nadu/ South-India. Examples of forms that are exclusive to Nagaswaram repertoire are *Mallari* and *Rakti*. Time-of-day conventions for *Raga*-s (for instance, from a gentle *Malayamarutam* during the unfolding of dawn, into a bright *Bilahari* for a chirpy morning, to a magnificent *Madhyamavati* to mark the blazing noon, to a grand *Sankarabharanam* associated with the splendour of evening, to a sedate *Neelambari* to match the tranquility of late night) have also been followed by many practitioners of Nagaswaram music, especially those associated with temple worship. Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitar, one of the celebrated trimurti composers, extols Lord Tyagaraja of Tiruvarur as one worshipped by the music of Nagaswaram and Maddala - “नागस्वर मद्दळादि वाद्यं” - *Naagasvara maddalaadi vaadyam* - in his composition *Tyaagaraaja Mahaadhvajaaroha* in *Sri Raga*. This great composer's father, Sri Ramaswami Dikshitar, played a seminal role in codifying the musical practices including those associated with the Nagasvara music, in the worship of Lord Tyagaraja of Tiruvarur.

The number of greats in Nagaswaram music over the last couple of centuries, are very many to even list out here. Sri BM Sundaram's work '*Mangala Isai Mannargal*' is like an encyclopaedia, with compiled biographical details of many of these greats. *Endaro mahanubhaavulu andariki vandanamu*.

Nagaswaram has played a pivotal role in shaping Raga based music. Long live the Nagaswaram!

Note: The above article has been adapted from a book chapter authored by Sri Shailesh Ramamurthy, published in “*Ninṇṇirum Minnal - Karukurichi P*

Arunachalam” compiled by Sri NAS Sivakumar, ‘*Atsharam Padippagam*’ (Aksharam Press), Kovilpatti.

Our Upcoming Programmes

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 03 Jul '22 Sunday, 5-30 p.m | Dr. Palakkad R. Ramprasad (Vocal), Mattur R. Srinidhi (Violin), Tumkur B. Ravishankar (Mridanga), G. Omkar Rao (Ghata) |
| 07 Aug '22 Sunday 5.30 p.m | TS Pattabhirama Pandit (Vocal), TV Ramanujacharyalu (Violin), Bangalore V Praveen (Mridanga), Ranganatha Chakravarthi (Ghata) |
| 04 Se '22 Sunday 5.30 p.m. | Dr. MS Subbulakshmi 106th Birthday Celebrations S Aishwarya & S Soundarya (Vocal duet - Great grand daughters of Dr. M.S.- Subbulakshmi), Mattur Viswajit (Violin), Phanindra Bhaskara (Mridanga), Sukanya Ramgopal (Ghata) |
| 02 Oct '22 Sunday 5-30 p.m | Krithi Bhat (Vocal), Sindhu Suchetan (Violin), BS Prashanth (Mridanga) |
| 29 Oct to 01 Nov '22 | Music Festival in Association with SUSWARALAYA COLLEGE OF MUSIC |
| 06 Nov '22 Sunday 5-30 p.m | Swarathmika (Vocal), Sindhu Suchetan (Violin), Akshay Anand (Mridanga) Courtesies : S. Anand Family |
| 13 Nov '22 Sunday 5.30 p.m | Rendering of compositions of Sri H. Yoganarasimham to commemorate with his 125th year Birthday Celebration. G Srikanth (Vocal), BK Raghu (Violin), Anoor Anantha Krishna Sharma (Mri- danga), Omkar Rao (Ghata). Sponsors by Fly of H Yoganarasimham |
| 04 Dec '22 Sunday 5.30 P.M | Sruthi Sagar (Flute), Vaibhva Ramani (Violin), GS Ramanujan (Mridanga), SN Narayanamurthy (Ghata) |

The Pied Piper of Carnatic music - TN Rajarathnam Pillai

Ravi & Sridhar, Tiruvannamalai.

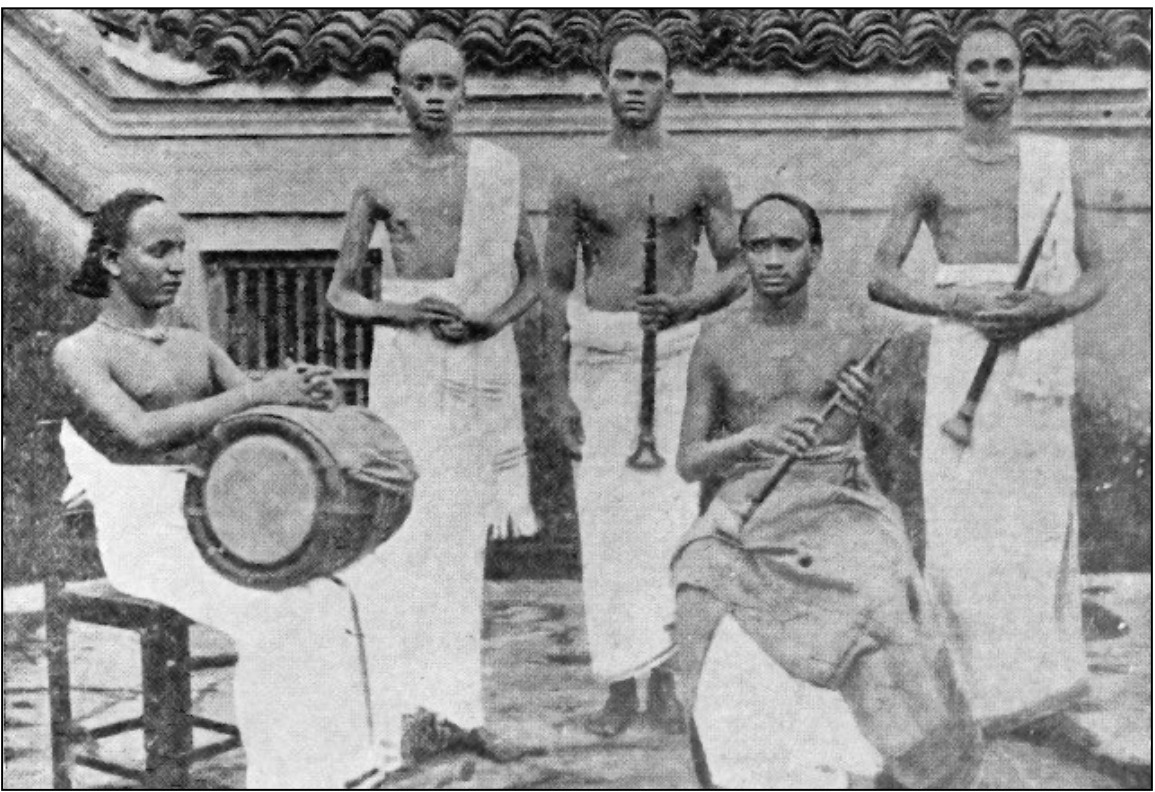


Loved the good things of life? Yes. Proud? Of course. Arrogant? Perhaps. Genius? Most certainly. These and much more describe the personality of the Nagaswaram wizard TN Rajarathnam Pillai. Along with his junior contemporary, Flute Mali, TNR was a darling of the masses, a trait he shared with Mali again for the idiosyncrasies and his dilly dallying with his concert engagements.

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, when asked who he would consider as geniuses in Carnatic music, replied, "Only three. Mali, Palghat Mani Iyer and Rajarathnam Pillai".

Rajarathnam Pillai was born on 27th August 1898 in the village of Tirumarugal in the then composite Thanjavur district. His father died when Rajarathnam was five years old. He was therefore given in adoption to his uncle Tirumarugal Natesan and was brought up by him. Natesan began teaching him the Nagaswaram even at that tender age.

It was when Rajarathnam was around 10 or eleven years old, that he was sent to nearby Tirukodikaval to learn from that great violinist Krishna Iyer (an uncle of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer). The guru liked the boy very much. He was also an admirer of the lad's uncle, Tirumarugal Natesan's Nagaswaram. One day, early in the tutelage, Tirukodikaval Krishna Iyer was teaching the Begada varnam of Veena Kuppayyar, 'Inta Chalamu' to Rajarathnam. Krishna Iyer would sing and play it on the violin and Rajarathnam had to vocally repeat. Try as he might, Rajarathnam could not get the gamakas of Begada properly. His responses were all flat. Krishna Iyer got angry after some time and with the bow of his violin struck the lad on his nose which started bleeding. 'No flat notes ever' admonished the guru. Tirukodikaval Krishna Iyer verbally appreciated, when TNR sang the Begada varnam the way it should be sung. The violent lesson had achieved its intention. Decades later, recounting the incident, Rajarathnam said, "Even in my dreams I did not intone flat swaras."



Vintage file photo of TN Rajarathnam Pillai with Tavil Panchami - Iluppur (a.k.a. Malaikkottai) Panchapakesa Pillai

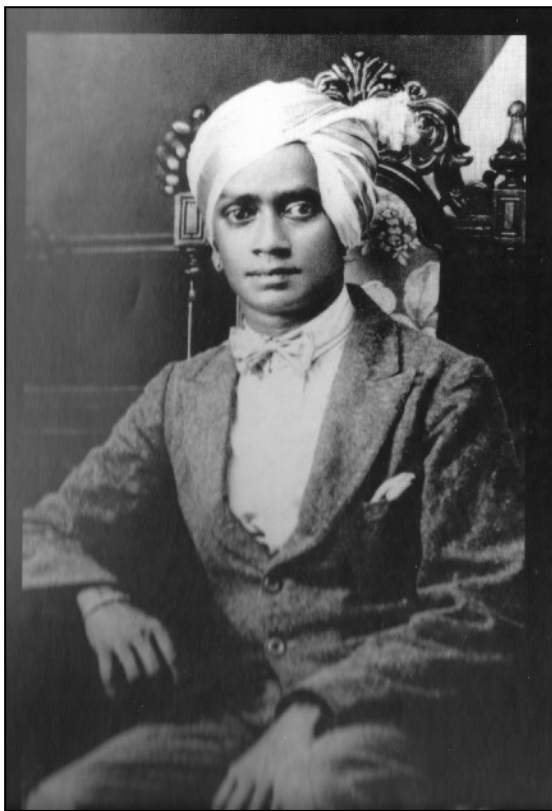
Rajarathnam also later, learnt Nagaswaram from Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai, an eminent musician. The tutelage with Kannuswamy Pillai lasted for only two years. That was all the training that Rajarathnam had on the Nagaswaram. Rajarathnam began giving vocal concerts when he was about eight. The Pontiff of the Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam suggested that Rajarathnam give up vocal music and take up regular playing of the Nagaswaram. The Pontiff also made him a regular player at a local Vinayaka temple. His unique style attracted many devotees to the morning service in the temple where Rajarathnam played a morning raga, Bhupalam, with the felicity and originality of a veteran artiste.

HIS MUSIC

Slowly, TNR (Rajarathnam) grew to become a well-known and sought-after concert player and gave a large number of concerts. His forte was the Raga Alapana. He played Niraval and Kalpanaswaras, yes, but these aspects were minimal. Rajarathnam was reputed to play Alapanas for hours together. It is said of him that 'he never played the same note twice'. This reputation

was a testimony to his boundless and infinite quality of his manodharma. Once he began exploring a raga, he traversed across its various regions which would be sublime as much as it was thrilling. He was known to be at his creative best in the mandra stayi regions. In the lower regions of the raga, Rajarathnam lost himself and it is said that he played for himself. Though Rajarathnam was justifiably famous for his exhaustive Alapanas of the raga Todi, he was equally great in ragas like Darbar, Shuba Pantuvarali, Saveri, Varali, Kambhoji, Kalyani, Kedaram and many more.

Sometime in the 1930s, TNR switched from playing the timiri Nagaswaram to the bari (pronounced baari) variety. The timiri was a short instrument and had a shrill tone making it difficult for many vidwans to maintain the sruti. The bari was a longer instrument and was comfortably adaptable for playing for long hours. In a very short time, all other Nagaswara vidwans switched over to the bari. The bari cannot intone the shuddha madhyama swara properly. To overcome this, TNR would stuff wax into the M1 hole order to produce the M1 properly.



TN Rajarathnam in a western suit

Another Nagaswaram great, Tiruveezhimizhalai Subramanya Pillai, while paying tribute to TNR at the Music Academy in 1956, after the latter passed away, said that TNR produced the MI by applying wax to the holes. But if others tried this trick, it would be a disaster. This remark of Tiruveezhimizhalai reveals the genius that TNR was.

Rajarathnam revelled in playing at temple processions. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer has time and again recalled his own childhood days at Tiruvidaimarudur when he was learning under Gottuvadyam Sakarama Rao about the Lord Mahalingaswamy temple festival's chariot procession. All the Nagaswaram greats would play for the procession on all the days of the festival. Raga Alapanas would be reserved for Rajarathnam. At around 1 in the morning, he would begin his Alapana of a raga. The chariot would stop. Thousands of people would gather to lis-

ten to the genius weaving his magic. In such an atmosphere, TNR's music was said to be played for the gods. He would forget himself and would explore the very depths of any raga he took up.

TNR acted in the lead role in the Tamil movie, 'Kalamegam', directed by Ellis R. Dungan made in 1940. He also appeared briefly as a Nagaswaram player in the 1939 film 'Tiruneelakantar'.

HIS LIFESTYLE

Throughout his performing career, Rajarathnam had a larger than life image. He had five wives, yes five! One after another he married, mainly for the sake of begetting progeny, which he never achieved. His first wife Saradambal herself was responsible for marrying him off four more times. And all of them lived under one roof! He lived most of his life in Tiruvavaduthurai, as asthana vidwan of the Saiva mutt there.

Too much possessed with his own greatness, TNR in 1955 made bold to expand his house so that it would be taller than the mutt itself. The Mathadipati didn't take kindly to what he perceived as TNR's arrogance and evicted him out of the house which was the mutt's property. After this TNR settled down in Madras and lived the last year of his life there. While living in Tiruvavaduthurai, he installed a sound system with a loudspeaker on his terrace, so that, when he played in his house the whole village and neighbouring areas could listen to it.

There was, just behind his house, the railway track which was the Kumbhakonam-Mayavaram line. TNR's hope was that when trains crossed his house, the passengers would listen to his music and remember him. Sometimes he travelled to Mayavaram by train. He held a glass of his choice beverage in his hand and would stand at the compartment door, sipping his drink. Some trains did not stop at Tiruvavaduthurai. TNR solved this problem easily. Whilst returning from Mayavaram when the Tiruvavaduthurai station approached, he pulled the chain and stopped the train, mostly just behind the back door of his house. Alighting, he would noncha-



TN Rajarathnam in a concert along with his disciple Karukurichi P Arunachalam. Taval Vidwan on left foreground is Nachiyarkoil Raghava Pillai

lantly walk to the station master's office and pay the fine, which was a princely Rs.5 at that time.

The car that he possessed was akin to a ship. All his pakkavadyams, his disciples, his first wife Sarada and his adopted son Sivaji travelled with TNR in that car. His diamond ear-rings were the size of the headlight of a car. This, TNR bought from another maverick musician SG Kittappa. His snuff box, was the size of a small suitcase. It was reportedly made in a combination of gold and silver and presented by violinist Papa Venkataramiah. TNR's betel leaves box, was the size of a big trunk case. All these were accommodated in the car and when TNR had to travel some long distance on a train, all this paraphernalia would travel with him in the first class compartment. T Sankaran, Veena Dhanqammal's grandson and several others have said that, a separate berth would be reserved for the snuff box, betel leaves box, and of course his Nagaswaram.

In 1955, TNR was to perform at the Music Academy at 9 pm. The earlier evening concert was of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan at the venue P S

High School grounds, which was the venue of the Academy December concerts. After Ghulam Ali Khan's concert, most people left and it became empty. In those days, though canteen facilities were available at the Music Academy, most people preferred to go home to eat. And if they wanted, they would return for the next concert. We do not know what today's canteen hoppers will think of this now. The concert was to be broadcast live. Around starting time, there were just about five people in the audience. No one had the heart to ask TNR to begin the concert with an empty ground staring at the great genius. TNR peeped through the curtains and said, "Jalatarangam Ramanayya Chetty and Balasaraswati are there. That's enough. Let's begin now so that the Radio broadcast is not delayed." He began the concert. Within minutes the whole ground was full and in the front two rows were seated Ariyakkudi, Semmangudi, Papa, Alathur brothers, Rajamanikkam Pillai, Mudicondan, Pazhani, Palghat Mani Iyer, Annasamy Bhagavathar and several others. With such a vidwat sadas listening to him, TNR explored the depths of Kanada, Begada and Varali.



TN Rajarathnam in a Nagaswaram procession with Veerusamy Pillai (Nagaswaram) and Meenakshisundaram Pillai on Tavil

Following this, in 1956, TNR had a series of concerts. By then he had settled down in Madras on 3rd Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adayar, bang opposite to the house of Dhanammal's grand-daughters Brinda and Muktha. TNR played for Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer's 60th birthday celebrations and for Rukmini Devi Arundale's birthday, where Mysore Vasudevachar, Karaikkudi Sambasiva Iyer, Papanasam Sivan and several other greats were present. At the end of the concert, Vasudevachar said, "I have nothing to say except that, we have only heard about Lord Krishna's venuganam, but today we have listened to it."

MALI and RAJARATHNAM PILLAI

In more ways than one, the two, Rajarathnam and Mali were similar in their attitude, thinking and their actions in their life.

Once, in the 1950s, there arrived at Mali's room a group of people, among whom was the Tamil film comedian NS Krishnan. He had come with his friends to request Mali to play at the marriage reception of his daughter. Now, Mali was not the one to easily accept concert engagements. He accepted concerts only when he found that he was running out of money for his drinks or when he knew the organiser was genuine in his intentions. NSK cajoled him, but to no avail.

All the while there was a fierce looking character sporting a huge moustache who was eyeing Mali with some kind of a threat on his face. After a while, when Mali didn't budge, the character took off the mask that he was wearing, and there stood Rajarathnam Pillai. There was much bonhomie after that and Mali agreed to perform at the wedding. The party then opened a huge flask and got going with what was their collective passion.

After some time, TNR asked Mali to bring out his flute. Now, such things never cut ice with Mali. None could simply ask him to play the flute and get away with it. Mali again demurred. But the way TNR cajoled, Mali ultimately gave in and put his flute to his lips. Whereupon TNR asked for Bhairavi. Mali told one of his friends KP Ramakrishnan, "You must have been there KPR. I plunged into Bhairavi as never before. Listening to it there was sheer disbelief on TNR's face". At the end of it TNR told Mali, "Thambi, you are one of us, not one of them."

A few weeks later, at a concert of Mali's at Kumbhakonam, TNR was present with his whole gang. After the main piece was over, TNR got up to leave. Whereupon Mali asked him, speaking into the mike, 'How is the concert? TNR flashed the thumb and forefinger signal to convey his total approval. Before the gang left,



TN Rajarathnam in a concert with P Bhuvaneshwari on Violin and Bangalore K Venkatram on Ghatam

one of them came up to the stage and placed a big can of some choice beverage as present for Mali. A case of the deep calling to the deep.

Early in 1956, TNR's health was much affected but he did not stop playing the Nagaswaram, much against the advice of doctors. After a concert at Alleppey in Kerala, after he returned to Madras by train, TNR began playing the Nagaswaram at the railway station itself. The owners of the Dasaprakash hotel in Madras, Seetharama Rao and Ananda Rao hosted him at their hotel for months together without charging anything. Even during the last months of his life. TNR refused to stop playing the Nagaswaram despite the doctors' strict instructions and his friends' entreaties. The Tamil thespian MR Radha would give TNR the whole evening's collection of his Tamil drama 'Ratha Kanneer'. The Tamil comedian couple NS Krishnan and TA Madhuram looked after TNR with love and affectionate care. Despite the efforts of friends and the doctors, TNR passed away on 12th December 1956. He was dressing up for a concert. Just as he was putting on his kurta, he let out a cry and collapsed, never to rise again. The Nagaswaram had taken its last bow.

The then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Kamaraj gave permission to play TNR's records during the funeral procession. The Kedaram that TNR had recorded just days earlier for the Radio was played all the way from TNR's Adyar home. Huge crowds lined the route from Adyar to the Mylapore crematorium. There was not a dry eye

in that crowd that listened to the ethereal Kedaram whilst paying respects to the mortal remains of that immortal genius.

A SUBLIME INCIDENT AT TIRUVAYYARU

It was in the early 1940s. The three factions that were conducting Thyagaraja's Aradhana separately at Tiruvaiyaru had merged and were conducting the Aradhana as one entity from 1941. Rajarathnam Pillai was to pay his obeisance through his immortal music to the bard of Tiruvaiyaru. Present in the audience were the who's who of the Carnatic music world, Tiger, Ariyakkudi, Chembai, Musiri, Semmangudi, GNB, Madurai Mani, Brinda-Muktha, Balasaraswathi, the Harikatha exponents Soolamangalam Vaidyanatha Bhagavata, Annasamy Bhagavata, the then reigning super star of Tamil cinema Thyagaraja Bhagavata, NS Krishnan and many others, besides hundreds of rasikas. Glittering in his silk attire and diamonds, TNR gave a sublime performance which mesmerised the audience. All of them were in a trance.

The concert ended. TNR rose from the podium, got down and began running in the northward direction towards the Kumbakonam road. The bigwigs who wanted to congratulate him were flabbergasted. TNR ran some distance and overtook a man who was walking with giant strides. With his angavastram tied around his hips, TNR fell flat on the sandy ground and rising, raised his palm towards the man. The latter was a bhairagi, clothed in tatters, a wandering sadhu, specimen you could sometimes come across in

the rural parts of this country at least until the 1970s. With tears streaming down his eyes, TNR asked the bhairagi, "Ayya, how was it?" "Hm", said the bhairagi and flashed a faint smile at TNR. The latter again prostrated before the half naked fakir and got up. The bhairagi ran away before others could even approach the place.

With wet eyes, TNR explained to the stunned vidwans, all of them not just stars in their own right, but great rasikas too, that the bhairagi was a spiritually advanced soul and also the greatest rasika of music that he, TNR, had ever come across in his life and that, to obtain a smile from him was akin to manna from heaven. Not in the least caring about the appreciation of the big

stars of the art world, TNR set great store by the reaction of a poor bhairagi in rags.

Proud? Yes. Arrogant? Perhaps. Genius? Most certainly, yes. Humble? Well, if the above incident is not a lesson in utter humility, then what is it?

(M Ravindra Narayanan and P Sridharan (Ravi and Sridhar) are devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and Carnatic music disciples of T Muktha, grand-daughter of Veena Dhanammal. They live in Tiruvannamalai. Follow them at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100007746821510>).

Between the cup and the lip

Legends grew around Rajarathnam Pillai even when he was living. The following are edited excerpts from a monograph written by BM Sundaram for the Percussive Arts Centre, Bangalore

Mavoor RS Sarma, knighted by the King of England and Emperor of India, was a man of high status and great influence. He built a Kali temple in Mavoor and, in connection with the consecration ceremony, he arranged many performances, including Harikatha kalakshepam by Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata and nagaswara music by Rajarathnam Pillai. Rajarathnam performed in tandem with Tiruvaidaimarudur Veeruswamy Pillai and Kulikarai Pichaiappa, with Meenakshisundaram Pillai as tavildar. A pleased Sarma suggested to Muthiah Bhagavata, who was an intimate friend and was then in the service of the Travancore ruler, that he persuade the Maharani to appoint Rajarathnam as asthana vidwan of her State. Sarma had already sent a personal letter recommending this step to Sir CP Ramaswami Iyer, the then Dewan of Travancore.

In the event, Rajarathnam was invited to perform at the Padmanabhaswamy temple, in the presence of the Travancore royalty. While the concert was in progress, Rajarathnam, in 'high

spirits', slapped the tavil vidwan. Maharani Sethu Parvati Bayi was so incensed by this that she decided that the State would not honour Rajarathnam after all. Sir CP explained to Muthiah Bhagavata and Sarma: "Really his music is magnificent but his manners are terrible. How could we appoint such a man as asthana vidwan?"

Some years later, Muthiah Bhagavata spoke to the Maharaja of Mysore about appointing Rajarathnam as the asthana vidwan. The Maharaja had never said 'no' to Bhagavata. With his consent, Muthiah Bhagavata invited Rajarathnam Pillai to perform in Mysore during the Dasara festival. The maestro was to play during the procession but, when the procession was about to move, Rajarathnam balked and said to Muthiah Bhagavata: "What is this? He may be a Maharaja and ride on an elephant. But I am an emperor in my own kingdom and will not play walking. Unless another elephant or a vehicle on which a high platform has been set up is arranged for me, I won't touch my instrument". Muthiah Bhagavata somehow cajoled him to perform but the end result was still as if Rajarathnam Pillai had refused to budge: He was not given the honour.

-Source Sruti December 1998 edition

Tavil Maestro TR Govindarajan

C Ramakrishnan, Chennai

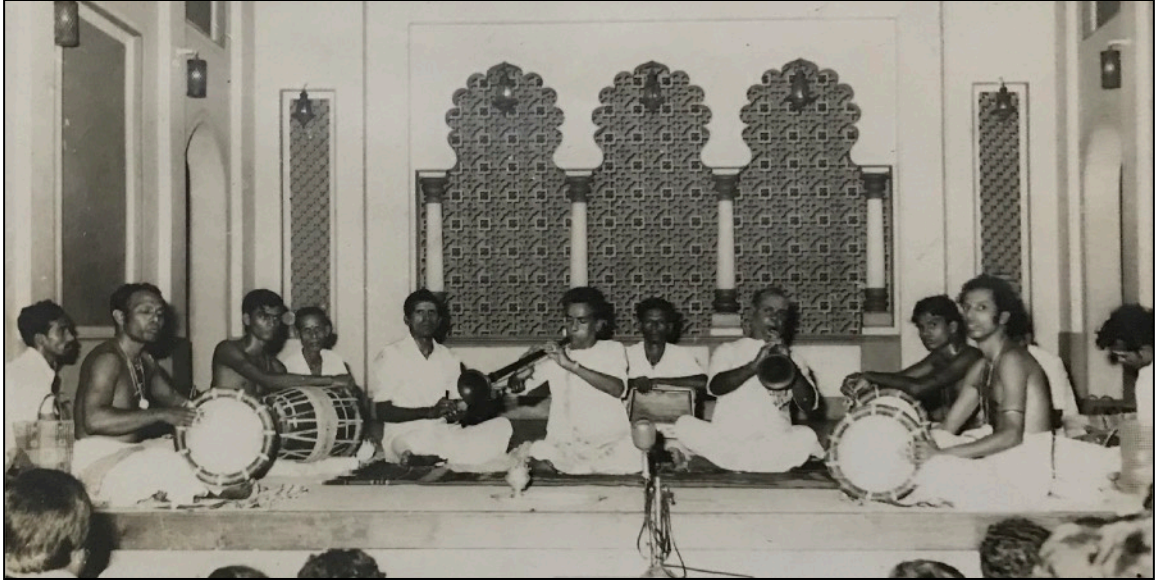


The importance for the Melam - comprising the Nagaswaram and Tavil in any Hindu function is phenomenal. Be in the temple, or in the society or in our homes. The rhythmic sound of the tavil adds colour and vibrancy to the melam. While a typical music concert starts with the vocalist commencing the music and the pakkavadyams joining him, a typical Nadaswara concert starts with the Tavil vidwan starting his playing and the Nadaswara vidwan joining him. A number of prominent tavildars like Nachiarkovil Raghava Pillai, Valangaiman Shanmugasundaram Pillai, Valayapatti AR Subramaniam, etc. ruled the scenario in the recent past. Tanjavur TR Govindarajan is the foremost Tavil vidwan in the contemporary music circuit who

is actively playing the melam and making it musical, vibrant and exotic. The tavil as it is, does not have a fixed pitch. It is in the hands of the expert tavil vidwan to join with the varied pitches of vocalists or instruments. Today, tavil is successfully partnering with mandolin, saxophone, veena, violin and even vocal music. Tanjavur TR Govindarajan, Haridwaramangalam AK Palanivel, Tiruvalaputhur TA Kaliamurthy and Vedaranyam Balasubramani are collectively known as "Tanjai Nalvar"- the Tanjavur Quartet of the modern era. Govindarajan has been acclaimed as a true superstar musician & tavil vidwan.

Tanjavur TR Govindarajan is the Assistant Secretary of Tiruvayyar Tyagaraja Aradhana Festival Committee and is doing yeoman service in the disciplined conduct of the mammoth festival which is a homage to the Saint Vaggeyakara Tyagaraja Swami.

Govindarajan was born in Tanjavur - the cultural belt of Tamil Nadu on 19 May 1952 and had his preliminary lessons from Tavil vidwan Needamangalam Shanmugavadivel, who was the son of the legendary Maestro Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai, from the young age of eight. In 1962, he came under the wings of Nachiarcovil Raghava Pillai and did gurukulavasam until his death in 1964. Raghava Pillai was a titan of his days having a towering personality, highly respected by all the musicians. He used to play the 'special tavil' for great Nagaswaram vidwans beginning from Tiruvaduthurai Rajarathinam Pillai, Tiruvenkadu Subramania Pillai, Tiruvidaimarudur PS Veerusami Pillai, Vedaranyam Vedomurthy, Semponnarkoil brothers, Tiruveezhimizhalai Brothers, Karukurichi Arunachalam and Namagripettai Krishnan. It



Tanjavur TR Govindarajan (left Tavil) supporting supporting the Nagaswaram concert of Kottur KN Rajarathnam Pillai and Veerachamy Pillai. The Two other Tavil Vidwans on the right side being Vedaranyam VG Balasubramaniam and Thiruppur TG Muthukumaraswamy. The concert was held during the wedding of the daughter of Madurai Somu at Chennai.

was a typical gurukulavasam of the olden days. There were no formal classes of fixed duration. The student had to do all the household chores, look after the cattle and serve the guru and learn by observing the guru and accompanying the guru in his marriage concerts and temple processions. There were hardly sabha concerts then. On a day when the guru started teaching, there was no time limit. Classes used to continue for hours till the Guru felt exhausted.

In the temple utsavam concerts, the concerts used to extend for six hours or even more. The procession would commence at 9 P.M and go around the four mada veechis with halts at specified places. The structure in the Nagaswaram performance gives abundant scope for tavil solos. In a typical Sabha concert, the performance commences with the tavil solo and the tavil would keep playing in between the alapana followed by a tavil solo elaborately before the kriti is taken. There are dictums of playing during various segments like alapana, pallavi, the interludes between pallavi - anupallavi, and anupallavi - charanam, apart from the aesthetics of accompanying for the kriti. The main tani avaratanam following the main kriti will be a grand affair with breathtaking sollus, uruttu sollus and mohra and complex korvais. Tavil plays a prominent role in embellishing a Nagaswaram concert and the tavil vidwan has to be alert with

his creativity throughout the concert - to be ready to fill up the gaps with his manodharmam. This also necessitates a comprehensive knowledge of techniques of playing besides mastery of laya as the tavil vidwan has to offer varied patterns to avoid repetition and participate competently in tanis with the co-artist. A good accompaniment is not the one who displays patterns that numerically fits the beat. It involves embellishment, enhancement and elevation of the overall musical experience of the concert

In marriage concerts also they have an important role for showcasing their creativity besides playing for specific marriage songs matching with the various rituals.

Govindarajan has accompanied all contemporary Nagaswara vidwans as 'Special Tavil' and other instrumentalists like A Kanyakumari, U Srinivas, Kadri Gopalnath, Ganesh Kumaresh, Rajesh Vaidya, UP Rajesh, Ustad Zakir Husain, Patri Satish Kumar etc. and also vocalists like Soolamangalm Sisters, Dr. Balamuralikrishna etc. Govindarajan got an opportunity to accompany legendary Nagaswaram Vidwan Karukurichi Arunachalam in 1963 for a portion of a concert when he was undergoing training with Nachiarkovil Raghava Pillai. The appreciation he got from the great Nagaswaram Vidwan is cherish-able till date.



Govindarajan is a globe trotter- he has gone on concert tours to America, Germany, France, Singapore, Muscat and Dubai where he also conducted many workshops.

Govindarajan served as Taval Professor in the Government Music College, Thiruvaiyaru.

In the present circumstances when the concert duration itself is condensed, the format has to be modified suitably. There is not enough space available for expansion of each note which was the norm of those days. The alapana has to be shortened and the space for taval also curtailed.

Govindarajan has received a series of awards from various Sabhas and temples. Kalaimamani from the Govt. of Tamil Nadu, Sangeetha Choodamani from Sree Krishna Gana sabha, award from Parthasarathy Swami Sabha are just a few among them.

TR Govindarajan being honoured by Nagaswara maestro MPN Sethuraman of Sethuraman-Ponnuswamy fame at the Sri Anjaneya Swami Temple, Nalu Kal Mandapam, Thanjavur

Rajarathnam Pillai and Self respect

Rajarathnam Pillai used to go to Tiruvaiyaru every year for the Tyagaraja Aradhana and play the nagaswara when the bard's portrait was taken in procession, but refused to play at the samadhi unless a platform was erected. Once he argued with violin maestro Tiruchi Govindaswamy Pillai who was then an organiser of the festival. He demanded: "When other musicians sit and sing, why not the nagaswara artist?" But Govindaswamy Pillai, in spite of the regard he had for Rajarathnam, would not agree to break the convention.

In 1940, when the Thiagabrahma Mahotsava Sabha came into existence, it took charge of the festival. Rajarathnam asked Tiruveezhimizhalai Subramania Pillai, one of the Secretaries: "If you are not in a position to make this change, what is the purpose of a nagaswara vidwan like you serving as Secretary?" And added for effect: "Better you resign." At this juncture, Justice P.V. Rajamannar, who was closely involved in matters musical, intervened and had a word with Musiri Subrahmania Iyer, the other Secretary, who conceded Rajarathnam Pillai's demand. Rajarathnam Pillai thus won the battle and, from then on, all nagaswara vidwans began performing seated on the platform, except in processions.

Source - Dr. BM Sundaram

The Magnificent Music of Vid. Karukurichi P Arunachalam

Shailesh Ramamurthy, Bangalore



The first half of the twentieth century had two legends, who were blessed with immense popularity as well as musical greatness. One is maestro Sri TN Rajarathnam Pillai (TNR), whose name is synonymous with the instrument. He was also the mentor to the subject of this article, Sri Karukurichi Arunachalam. TNR was a staggering genius, whose imaginative and unbounded creative forays went beyond the conventional and predictable, though the music was anchored in a sense of classical aesthetics. Sri Karukurichi Arunachalam's music – equally breath-taking, adhered to the musical conventions that music rasikas were used to, though his creativity also expanded the canvas of rich manodharma oriented music.

It is said that Sri Karukurichi Arunachalam's father was greatly impressed by the legendary Nagaswaram vidvan, Sri Kurainadu Natesa Pillai, who composed varnams with several original

ideas, for instance, featuring sections with take-off points that are not seen in other varnams. As an example, a varnam in Jyotishwarupini has the charana-swaras taking off 4 inner units before samam but they end at samam where the caranam begins. Some of the ragas and talas he composed in were not often used. Ragas like Jyotishwarupini, Amritavahini have been employed. The latter varnam is in the tala misra jhampai.

Words often are insufficient to convey musical thoughts, ideas and experiences. Even so, the following sections endeavor to convey a glimpse of Sri Karukurichi Arunachalam's music. For the sake of brevity, the vidwan's name has been indicated as simply Karukurichi, the place he brought fame to!

Rich tonality - *sunaadam and suswaram*

A rich and full tone, aligned to *sruti*, is what comes to mind as one pictures Karukurichi's music. While Nagaswaram players in general have to exercise great care to avoid or minimise pisiru-s or tonal-slips, one finds Karukurichi's playing so consistently tuneful, that it completely erases even the possibilities of such slips, from the listener's mind !

The listener's attention is first drawn to the amount of energy invested in the elongated notes (*kaarvai-s*) as well as sustained phrases involving a cascade of musical notes now in movement, played with seemingly a single breath, all with rich tonality.

After a *sanchaara* (musical phrase) in rapid motion like a cascading waterfall, rich in its own tone, in the middle octave - when Karukurichi dipped into the lower octave and sustained an

elongated *mandra sthayi gandhara* (lower octave musical note 'ga') with a rich, reedy, bass tone, in say, a raga like Suddha Dhanyasi, the contrasting relief that the lower octave *saukhyam* and the visraanti of the *kaarvai* (sustained elongated note) brought in, is an experience by itself. On top of this rich tone or *sunadam*, he built his world of *suswarams* - beautiful musical notes suitably approached and connected. The long phrases were richly endowed with (what some musicians colloquially call) double or *rettai* gamaka characteristic in Nagaswaram playing. A phrase in say, Shanmukhapriya or Natabhairavi like *dns-nsr-srg* is sounded with higher level of blended details of *dndn s - nsns r - srsr g*. The note transitions in these details are never abrupt. By a consummate synergy between the blowing and fingering technique, the details are all smoothly connected with *kuzhaivu*. Incidentally, when we are on Natabhairavi - while a tiny capsule of Sri TN Rajarathnam Pillai's Natabhairavi is available in a rare 78 rpm, an elaborate essay of Karukurichi is also available in a concert recording. These also capture the individual styles of the maestros that we referred to, earlier in this article. Of course, there are elaborate recordings in other raga-s like Todi and Shanmukhapriya of both maestros (to name a few), for us to savour their individual elaborate treatments.

Other embellishments like *bRga*, *jaaru*, *pratyahata gamaka*-s also shone like gems in Karukurichi's renditions. While such embellishments define the very character of Nagaswaram music in general, Karukurichi's masterly execution of long passages filled with such details set



the highest standard for Nagaswaram music for times to come.

Aside:

1. In terms of *mandra sthayi* forays, while TNR has touched the *mandra* or lower-octave *sa* (a full octave below the tonic) in a recording featuring an *alapana* of Shanmukhapriya, Karukurichi has also touched the *mandra* *rishabha/shadja* region in a recording that features his Todi *Alapana* for *kaddanuvairiki*. This requires careful calibrated blowing pressure as well as positioning and adjustment of 'sivali' with care.
2. As was the practice those days, Karukurichi's concert photos show that he also used an *othu* for *sruti*. While Karukurichi was seated facing the audience, the *othu* player was behind Karukurichi, seated in an orientation that was perpendicular to the direction that faced the audience.

Raga Alapanas; quest for the esoteric in the realm of pure classical

Traditionally, Nagaswaram has shown the way to elaborate Raga Alapanas. For hours together, the Nagaswaram vidwans would improvise ragas, rendering Alapanas well into the night during festivals. The daily rituals and festivities gave artistes the opportunity to hone their skills and exhibit their mastery.

Coming to the hero of this article, viz. Karukurichi, the said *sunadam*, musical embellishments and phrasings provided him a solid foundation to build his inimitable Raga Alapanas upon. The different degrees of intensity, embellishment and range which adorned each musical phrase with precision made his Raga Alapanas exemplary. To add to the list of musical techniques of embellishment already cited, he used a balanced approach involving *viraladi* (finger strokes typically in faster phrases), *kuzhaivu* (blended and smoothening of edges in approach to notes), cascading phrases across octaves, *jaaru*-s (slides emphasised) like in *Kaambhoji s..n.. dpd..*. The *jaaru*-s could also span across a larger range of notes. The effect was verily that

of an infinite spread of the rich tapestry of a musical carpet.

Karukurichi would emphasise the *Jeeva svaras* of a Raaga in a variety of ways, imparting different levels of musical *azhutham* (emphasis) and '*chin-nadhu-perisu*' based dynamics. His stage by stage build-up of elaborate Raaga Alaapanas was a lesson in itself. While his mentor Sri TNR included some very unpredictable *varjya prayogas* (skipped notes) in lightning like flashes, which made for stunning effect and catchy musical phrases, Karukurichi made his Alaapanas equally deep and attractive, but perhaps without the said unconventional phrases. This imparted a sense of familiarity to the listener, even as they were witnessing something much grander than what they were familiar with (from listening to other musicians).

From a published article, we also get to know that Karukurichi revealed in elaborating the less explored in the realm of pure classical music.

"He would ask us: do you want me to sing? I get the chance to sing rare classical rAgAs to you. In many concerts, the requests are mostly for cinema songs and maguDi...We would take pleasure in asking him to sing rAgAs like Kanakangi, Ratnangi, Vakulabharanam, naamanArAyaNi and such. He would steep us in joy and continue on his journey."

In this context, we also find elaborate essays of raga-s like Takka, in his concert recordings. Conforming the Arohana-Avarohana krama (scale) of the popular version of Raakaa Sasivadana, he imparts long *karvai-s* on plain notes and connects them with *jaaru-s/slides*. These segments of the Alapana seem to impart a somewhat new flavour to the Raaga, bordering on the plaintive and melancholic.

Balance of vocal and instrumental idioms

It would be no exaggeration to say that Karukurichi's Nagaswaram literally sang. For any instrumentalist who displays a vocalist's temperament or *gaayaki-anga*, it should be remembered that this aspect does not limit itself to compositions or the lyrics thereof alone. It also implies that the smoothness of vocal delivery, the richness of vocal *gamaka-s*, the warmth of a

human voice have all been combined into the overall mix, along with the instrumental virtuosity.

We will now look at his handling of vocal based compositional material.

Among Nagaswaram artistes of his times, he was one of the best in investing care with the temperament of a vocalist, in shaping his *sangatis* for his *kritis*. Even in his times and slightly before, of course, there were a few schools of Nagaswaram playing which specialised in playing *kritis* as handed down to them in pedigreed *paaTham-s*. For instance, Tiruppamburam Natarajasundaram Pillai, who published the '*Dikshita Keertanai Prakasika*' and was in the lineage of Dikshitar's *sishya parampara*, and had a huge repertoire of authentic versions of *kritis*. Tiruvizhimizhalai brothers also were known for their rendition of compositions, among other aspects. Karukurichi, who was not affiliated to any of these schools per se, pursued his path as a multidimensional Nagaswaram virtuoso, excelling in various aspects beyond *kriti* renditions. He also shone in his diligent presentations of *kritis*. Some eyewitnesses have recounted that he took special care in planning the *sangatis* and structure of the *kritis* he rendered.

It must be remembered that the genius TNR also sang very well (and his vocal recordings are available for all to hear – the influence of his breathtaking music on Nagaswaram is also visible in his singing style !). That said, Karukurichi seems to have invested extra care in delivering polished versions of compositions, their structure and constituent *sangati* structure, played with relatively greater rigour and more systematically, in his own style with embellishments. Examples of his recordings of Chakkanirajamargamu and Kaddanuvaariki come to mind, where he has elaborated parts with systematic *sangati* structures. It has been said that Karukurichi received dedicated vocal music training under vidwans Kalakkad Sri Subbiah and Ramanarayana Bhagavatar-s. While it is true that some great vidwans of other instruments like the violin and veena have supremely polished the way *kritis* are rendered on instru-

ments and became exemplars for today's standards, Karukurichi's own robust, sincere renditions of kritis, playing to his own strengths and style, and those of his instrument, set a benchmark for his times for the Nagaswaram.

Some of the kritis which Karukurichi rendered, that come to mind from hearing his recordings, include Pranamamyaham (Gaula), Jnanavinayakane (Gambhira nattai), Subrahmanyena (Suddha Dhanyasi), Chakkanirajamargamu (Kharaharapriya), Kaddanuvairiki (Todi), Thamadamen (Todi), Akshayalinga (Sankarabharanam), Mamava sada (Nattakkurinji), Ramannin (Huseni), Ela nee (Athana), Samajavaragamana (Hindolam), Mamavatu Sri Sarasvati (Hindolam), I vasudha (Sahana), Sarasijanabhasodari (Nagagandhari), Raaka Sasivadana (Takka), Raamaabhi (Dhanyasi), Koluvaivunnade (Bhairavi), Maadhava maamava (Neelambari), Naane Unai Nambinen (Hamsanandi, Vedanayakam Pillai). Some programme lists published by the Music Academy also have included Vallabhanayakasya (Begada), Kana kann (Kambhoji), Samagaanaapriye (Anandabhairavi), Karunasamudra (Devagandhari), Raghuvara (Pantuvrali/Kamavardhan), Hariharaputram (Vasanta). Among the items that he played in the last portion of his concerts include AmudhamooRu (Tirupugazh he rendered in Sindhubhairavi), Thillana in Sankarabharanam, Chinnanjirukiliye, Thamarai Pootha (in 'Hindustani-Gandhari' Tiruchy Tyagarajan)

In an article authored by Ku.Azhagirisami (Kalki, April 6th, 1964) published when Karukurichi departed (available in Sri Pasupathy's blog at <https://s-pasupathy.blogspot.com/2020/04/1512-225.html> , also translated by author Smt 'Arasi' in rasikas.org), we come across the following mention.

He (Karukurichi) sang Natabhairavi for nearly one and a half hours. "I would have given vocal performances too. However, I was hesitant since my guru might have felt that I would not give as much attention to my Nadaswaram playing if I took that up," he said.

He had a beautifully sweet voice, the tone of which enhanced its sweetness even more. He would em-

ploy all sangatis of the nadaswaram in his singing. He handled difficult piDis effortlessly with the richness of his voice and vivid imagination.

Other aspects of his repertoire of compositions

We do not have recordings of too many varnams rendered by Karukurichi. From recordings we have access to, we can hear Neranammitinayya (Kaanadaa, Ata). However, his close associates like Sri Mandira Kambar have mentioned that Karukurichi inspired his musical mentees to learn many varnams including uncommon ones. (Information courtesy Sri 'LalithaRam')

Karukurichi also had an enviable repertoire of *Mallari-s* though we may not have them on recordings that are available to us. Some of the *mallari-s* he has rendered have been recounted by Nagaswaram artiste Meenakshi (Minatchi) Kambar, in talas like Misra Jhampai and Khanda Triputa. The misra jhampai has been recreated in notation in this article, below, based on an informal audio of a vocal rendition by the said artiste, recording snippet kindly shared by author Sri 'Lalitharam'.

NSGMP, - MPMGMSG M,P,P, - PMGMSG M,P | , P, - M | GMSGM, P, ||

P, - MGSGM, P, P, - GM,P,P, - Ġ, Š, NPM - Š, | N,PM | G - N,P,MSG ||

After a prefix NSGMP, the *mallari* introduces the long phrase MPMGMSG M,P,P, which is followed by progressively decreasing segments of the same phrase (*gopuccha yati*).

Thus, the longer phrase MPMGMSG M,P,P, is followed by the following decreasing progressions

- PMGMSG M,P , P,
- MGMSGM, P, P,
- MGSGM, P, P,
- GM,P,P,

After this *yati*, the *mallari* ends with a triplet of sevens in its finale. The effect that a multi-speed rendition of this would have had (along with the

tisra nadai speed variant) can only be imagined for its grand effect in the hands of Karukurichi.

Vinyls and professional recordings that have stood the test of time

Adapting Shakespeare from Antony and Cleopatra, it can be said about Karukurichi that "Age cannot wither his style, nor custom stale / His infinite variety". This is especially borne out by the vinyl records that were professionally recorded and brought out in the mid-20th century. Several decades have passed but the renditions are evergreen in *rasika*-s' minds. Even today, when a professional live Nagaswaram cannot be engaged in certain situations, these records are often played at functions requiring Nagaswaram. Ela nee dayaraadu (Athana, that he starts with the anupallavi Baala kanakamaya), Rama Ninne (Huseni), I vasudha (Sahana), Sarasijanabha Sodari, Chakkanirajamargamu – all of these have been evergreen favourites.

Musically, one can notice certain aspects of his style in these relatively shorter renditions (compared to elaborate ones in his concert recordings). The Raga Alapana for Nattakkurinji (Maamava sadaa) is charming, with several long phrases packed with Raaga bhava. There are some charming jaarus (musical slides) like N, S, / S, or even somewhat unexpected ones like M/ R,, where the upper octave rishabha is held in its position. There is a long free-flowing sanchara (Alapana like) at the end of the pallavi as also when the first line of Anupallavi is held by suffixing a long phrase. The recording of Saamajavaragamana in Hindolam also has similar charming examples of such free-flowing *sanchara*-s. These showcase the strength of Nagaswara bani in portraying rich Raga *bhaavam* in a sprawling and unhurried manner. His masterly slide (*jaaru*) and *kuzhaivu* (blended notes) in sancaras like pr'd,, , in a surfing wave in Sarasijanaabhasodari, the contrasting seemingly-staccato or minimalistically-connected pa and ma in phrases like pmpm in the initial free-flowing phrases while introducing bhaavukamu-kalgi, the anupallavi of I vasudha, the rich raga bhava of Huseni including some of his unique phrasings at places, all of these lend a unique stylistic

flavour to his renditions. Needless to say, the recordings featuring Mamavatu Sri Sarasvati as well as Saamajavaragamana usher in the lilt of Hindolam in an enrapturing manner, with *kuzhaivu*-s employed at every opportunity, to make the listeners' hearts melt as it were. In the recording of Saamajavaragamana, when the pallavi sangatis move to the dhaivatam, the note is extended with a smooth slide, with an artistic liberty, such that it subsumes some of the subsequent syllables of the lyrics – the artiste and the listeners are united in *advaita bhaava* in transcendental bliss of the this note that literally transcends the need for the music to immediately proceed and anchor some of the subsequent lyrical syllables in their pre-composed positions in the taala avartana as per convention.

Under the category of professionally recorded audio, we are also reminded of his renditions of Nagaswaram music for *Konjum Salangai*. While his rendition adapted for the song Singaara velane is known to everyone, the same movie also features other renditions. A grand Begada passage, a melting kaanada (with occasional incorporation of lower dha quite acceptable in the celluloid context as well as the musical practice of those times by certain musicians), Veena Sri Seshanna's tillana in jhanjhuti (cenjurutti), all of these definitely deserve special mention. These can still be heard by querying for Konjum Salangai on internet video portals.

Other aspects of his creative explorations in music

In his kalpana svaras, while we find many brief initial rounds of swaras in the conventional music we hear in say, vocal concerts, we do not seem to find too many short or brief initial rounds of swaras in Karukurichi's swaras. For instance, his recording of Maamavatu in Hindolam directly takes off into a long passage of kalpana swaras before indicating the refrain (Maamavatu) – this specific case could be due to the time limit on professional recordings of those days. Of course, he has played a few short initial rounds of swaras on other occasions. Very soon in his swara section say in the fast tempo,

we find long streams, sometimes almost a torrential outpour of swara-s, where the Nagaswaram combines with the tavil to render a continuous stream of swaras which are not trivially anchored on the beats of the tala. Sometimes, it culminates in swaras that appear to be played in the next speed (of the fast tempo). For the extremely fast swara segments, he imparts the required effect by intelligently using the legato-style blowing (without separate tongue strokes for the individual notes of the high speed swaras). The speed of the swaras is maintained due to the fingering speed and intelligent synergy with the crisp strokes from tavil. This underlines the fact that while he did not stint in imparting intensity and effect to the proceedings, he also used the strength of his instrument to create the effect, without applying the most intuitive and perhaps naïve technique (fast tonguing for individual swaras) which would have created a boundary limiting the possible speed. This style, of course, would have been likely used by other Nagaswara vidwans as well.

In a recording of his Kaddanurvariki, we find several interesting rounds within kalpana swaras, where the *todi nishadam* in its position (without a pronounced oscillation aka *deergha kampita*) is emphasised in a catchy but aesthetic fashion.

As with some other Nagaswara greats especially of that era, we do not find a *taanam* section in the so-called *Ragam (Tanam) Pallavi* suite. In the specific case of Karukurichi, there seems to be another interesting characteristic. In many cases, we find an elaborate *Alapana* followed by what appear as waltzing swaras which are played without any immediately following *Pallavi*-like refrain initially. They continue onto the fast swaras and then there is a culmination into a refrain-like musical phrase. In some other recordings, we do hear a conventional *Pallavi-Purvangam* after this seeming swara section. A *tavil tani* often is interleaved in between these proceedings. (For completeness, it must be mentioned that the said '*pallavi-purvangam*' could be actually be a *pallavi* or the *Rakti* form, typically in *misram*, specifically used in Na-

gaswaram music - depending on what has been chosen as the refrain that is used for elaboration in the '*Pallavi*' suite. The *Ragamalika* swaras that follow would have definitely been eagerly awaited by all sections of the *rasikas* listening 'live' to his concerts that we hear as recordings. There are stretches of elaborate *raga sancharas* (like within an *alapana*) within *kalpana* swaras where the *tavil* stops for a while. This heightens the effect in his chosen style of rendition.

The above aspects are but a tip of the iceberg of Karukurichi's musical greatness. The instant appeal his playing had, on *rasika*-s is borne out by his popularity. In addition to this, he set very high and permanent benchmarks, adding and setting store rich musical values for the generations of Nagaswaram players after his times. He belonged to times when the Nagaswaram primarily portrayed the *Raaga* expansively. Without losing sight of this goal, he also worked diligently on presenting composed material (e. g. *kritis*) in a sincere manner. There have been many skilled Nagaswaram artistes who came after Karukurichi, but perhaps due to changing audience tastes and requirements (in part), their focus on presenting composed material perhaps got emphasised at the cost of presentation of expansive *Raaga* based music. The musical phrasings in later day Nagaswaram renditions perhaps emphasised clipped and staccato phrasings more than long, legato phrasings. Given that various factors that seemingly pull any multidimensional artiste in various directions would have existed in his times as well, it is indeed amazing how Karukurichi (and some others until his generation) balanced all these requirements - expansive style of Nagaswara music, *manodharma* aspects, compositional content presentation, audience familiarity of the vocal *kutchery* pattern, to name some- with a sense of proportion such that his music remains unique and shines as an exemplary beacon.

Note: The above article has been adapted from a book chapter authored by Sri Shailesh Ramamurthy, published in "*Ninṇōḷirum Minnal – Karukurichi P Arunachalam*" compiled by Sri N.A. S. Sivakumar, '*Atsharam Padippagam*' (Aksharam Press), Kovilpatti.

Lokakshemam Vahaamyaham .. HH Sri Sri Jeeyar Swamiji of Yathiraja Mutt, Melukote

S Anand, Bangalore

Seldom do we come across “a Matadhipathi” or “a Swamiji” considering music as a penance in the midst of his religious practices and commitments. Here is one such 'mahanubhava' who has not only revolutionised the promotion of Karnatic classical music during his 'poorvashrama' but even now as 'matadhipathi' of 'Yadugiri Yathiraja Mutt'. It is a daily routine for him to listen to music every night before retiring. He is well learned in music and has developed a taste to analyse music based on 'Ragas' i.e. taking a raga and analysing compositions rendered by the various maestros in that same raga. SRLKM is grateful for his time and for sharing his thoughts.

LKT: Please tell us about your musical upbringing under Vidwan KJ Venkatachar and the environment in Mysore

Jeeyar Swamiji: I was born in Melukote, one of the sacred places in Karnataka. We had an excellent music ecosystem at home where music used to thrive. All India Radio was the main source of music and my father used to tune in to AIR National Program, South Zone hook-up, etc. regularly. My aunt, Smt. Radha, a disciple of Sri. Anna Sami Iyengar was an advanced harmonium player. My sister used to play on Violin. We could hear the wonderful Nagaswaram music emanating from the temple every day. During the festivals, several top-grade musicians were invited to perform at the temple and I used to attend every one of those concerts without fail. I was inspired by Karnatic music at a very young age.

After my High-School at Melukote, I relocated to Mysore to take up my higher education and

Shri. Krishnaprasad is a very special person that I have come across. It is probably unparalleled the way he and his sisters have set aside their life for the service of music. I wonder if there is any other organisation that is managed through one's own funding...Jeeyar Swamiji

stayed in hostel accommodation. I was influenced by a couple of co-students in the hostel who were learning Violin. I enrolled myself in Violin classes at Bidaram Krishnappa Mandira, a sabha that was directly managed by Mysore T Chowdiah Ji, and came under the tutelage of Vid. KJ Venkatachar. He was a disciple of Chowdiah ji and used to play the seven-stringed Violin. My Guru used to perform Violin duet concerts with Chowdiah Ji very often.

Mysore was a great place for music. There used to be regular performances by masters to a packed audience at Rama Mandira. Chowdiah Ji used to make his appearance every now and then to listen to concerts. Many maestros from Madras who took pride in performing at Mysore made it even more enjoyable. Shri. MA Narasimhachar in Mysore used to host the artists from Madras. Long after the concert also one could see people standing on the nook and corner of the road technically analysing and discussing the concert. I was transported to a wonderful world of music and it made a strong impact on me.



LKT: Please explain your involvement with music after you relocated to Bangalore

Jeeyar Swamiji: I relocated to Bangalore in the year 1965 and enrolled myself for B. Com at MES College, Malleswaram. I got the opportunity to learn vocal music from Vid. Chintalapalli Ramachandra Rao through my friend Narasimhan who was his disciple. Bangalore presented a continuation of the musical environment that I experienced in Mysore. Later on, in 1966-67, I along with one Karthikeyan started a Sangeetha Sabha where we used to conduct mic-less concerts at BP Indian High School in Malleswaram. My involvement with music only enhanced after coming over to Bangalore. A few years after I joined 'Rashtrottana Parishat', I independently started an institute called 'Adarsha Academy of Music and Culture' where we propagated music and dance. I was also instrumental in starting music concerts at 'Adarsha Bhavana' in Malleswaram 15th Cross where programs are being held even today. We featured Bangalore S Shankar for the inaugural concert. I still remember that concert on a rainy day where Bangalore S Shankar excelled. With the help of one Shri. Murthy, a chartered accountant and an active member of the Malleswaram Sri Rama Mandira, started conducting month-long concerts for 'Raja Rajeshwari Kalaniketana' during 'Sri Rama Navami' festival. Over time, when the hall was not able to accommodate the audience, we moved over

to a make-shift pandal on the road. DK Pattammal, Lalgudi Jayaraman, Bombay Sisters, RK Srikantan, etc. used to grace the festival and it was a huge success. This sabha was next only to Malleswaram Sangeetha Sabha. Subsequently, we started monthly concerts and workshops. We also conducted the 'Navarathri Sangeetholsavam' and also instituted a title 'Sangeetha Samrat' which was given away to eminent musicians like RK Srikantan, Anoor Ramakrishna, Veene Doreswamy Iyengar, etc.

So the passion for music that started in Mysore got firmly rooted in Bangalore. Personally, music gave me solace and peace of mind all my life and I have inculcated it as a habit to listen to music daily. I listen to recorded concerts of old masters for a couple of hours before going to bed. Dr. Keshava Prasad, a very good friend of mine has shared recordings of old live concerts and some of them are outstanding concerts.

Music is an important means for people to 'realise God', that includes people who have renounced the world also. Our mind becomes one with God by listening to music. Sage Yajnavalkya in his text 'Yajnavalkya Smriti' (3-115) says;

वीणावादनतत्त्वज्ञः श्रुतिजातिविशारदः ।

तालज्ञश्चाप्रयासेन मोक्षमार्गं निगच्छति ॥

A person who knows the science of veena playing (as described by Bharata), who is an expert in the

Shruti and Jatis (as described in the Bharata shashtra), who knows the Talas, will go to the path of Moksha without any effort.

LKT: 'Alvars' and 'Acharyas' played an important role in propagating the Bhakti movement in South India through their poetry and music. Please provide your insight on their contribution to our Music

Jeeyar Swamiji: In the ancient days, Alvars who belonged to South India provided the impetus to our music. Four Thousand divine 'Pasurams' (hymn's praising Narayana or Vishnu) were composed by 12 Alvars together forming 'Naalayira Divya Prabandham'. The Pasurams are a very good representation of our music and follow its principles. The era of 'Acharyas' begins after Alvar's and the very first Acharya by the name Nathamuni Acharya collected and compiled the Naalayira Divya Prabandham. He also classified the same similar to the way Sage Vedavyasa classified the Vedas into Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. Nathamuni Acharya was a musician par excellence and he was instrumental in setting the culture of singing the Naalayira Divya Prabandham in temples. Even today, one can witness 'Araiyaar Sevai', singing and enactment of the hymns of the Naalayira Divya Prabandham by the decedents of Nathamuni Acharya at Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam. The legend has it that 'Sri Ramanujacharya' used to attend 'Araiyaar Sevai' and at times guide the enactments and the sequences.

The music that was ingrained in the rituals started by Nathamuni Acharya was further propagated by Sri Ramanujacharya. Sri Ramanujacharya used to sing 'Thiruppavai' in its specific raga and sequence during his 'unchavritti' every day. Similarly, there are music ingrained rituals in Melukote where there is a tradition of our earlier gurus playing Veena for Lord Cheluvanarayana Swamy as part of the rituals. All these are significant contributions of Alvars and Acharyas. Many research projects have been undertaken on this subject and the resulting theses are available on record today.

I have been reading 'Sruti' a prominent music magazine for several years and have also archived them. Lalitha Kala Tarangini rates at par with Sruti with excellent content. The quality of the publication makes one interested to read. My appreciation and blessings to the Editor and the entire team....Jeeyar Swamiji

LKT: Please elaborate your involvement with ISKCON, especially institutionalising the music programs as an offering to God

Jeeyar Swamiji: Life has always been a journey in the world of music for me. By the grace of Sri Ramanujacharya and my forefathers, I have had the opportunity to associate myself in the area of music, literature, culture, philosophy, social service, etc. I spearheaded a project to publish 50,000 copies of a Kannada version of 'Bhagavad Gita' at ISKCON. While ISKCON management conducted various rituals and Bhajans, there were no music concerts by way of offerings to Lord Krishna. 'Krishna Kalakshetra', a new cultural wing of ISKCON Bangalore came into being through my association where music concerts were held every Saturday and Sunday. Special focus was accorded to singing 'Dasara padas' and concerts were held while offering pooja to Lord Krishna. We also charted out a 60-day music festival during 'Krishna Janmashtami' and invited top-ranking artistes. Senior musicians like RK Srikantan, Kadri Gopalanath, TS Satyavathi, MS Sheela, etc. were accorded the status of 'Asthana Vidwan'. 'Dikshitar Day' was celebrated every year during the 'Deepavali' festival. I was overwhelmingly supported by the directors and team ISKCON in all these ventures and was given a free hand to implement the programs. Indeed it was revolutionary and a mass movement. The musical environment that started in those days is flourishing even today.

LKT: In the olden days, South India played a significant role in the 'Bhakti movement'. How much did Carnatic Music contribute to this



Jeeyar Swamiji with Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar

considering our vaggeyakaras composed music that was soaked in Bhakti?

Jeeyar Swamiji: Our music can be traced back to the 'Samaveda' and the music emanated from the 'Pranava nada' or 'Omkaara'. The seven swaras gave rise to the world of music. While listeners attention can be drawn towards the 'Grammar' or 'Vidwat' or artistes 'Creativity' in a typical Karnatic concert, it is the 'Namasan-keerthana', 'Bajans', 'Bhakti Sangeeta' that fully soak the audience with Bhakti and Bhava. Sri Ramanujacharya started the practice of singing the Divya Prabandam as a musical composition and it has remained so as of today. Our composers, be it the 'Trinity' or the 'Dasa Parampara', never composed music meant to be performed on the concert stage. Their compositions were a manifestation of their Bhakti especially when they visited temples and in the vicinity of God. They never bothered to even document thousands of their compositions as it was extempore and were meant to be an offering to God.

LKT: Carnatic music is slowly losing its patrons which is evident from the people attending the live concerts. In the last three years, this is compounded by the pandemic. What is your advice to institutions to spread the reach?

Jeeyar Swamiji: While the pandemic has hampered our music, it has also brought along some advantages. Before the pandemic, online con-

certs were rare but thanks to the pandemic many concerts are now being made available on the internet, and people irrespective of where they are in the world can watch and enjoy it. My preference is that we should continue to do what we are doing and overcome obstacles if there are any in the journey of service to music. We at 'Sri Mutt' have moved over to making our 'Upanyasa' online. We have also conducted music concerts which were recorded and made available online. My guess is that we have seen the end of lockdown though the pandemic may show up in spurts. We have now started programs in-house and the audience response is as it was before the pandemic. If there is an effort to organise music concerts which is as sincere as that of Shri. Krishnaprasad, I don't see any reason why we will not see the audience in big numbers again. The journey of our music will be continuous and never-ending though there will be aberrations along the way.

LKT: Despite your packed schedule, how are you able to dedicate your personal time to listen to music?

Jeeyar Swamiji: I have studied Sri Ramanujacharya's life very closely and have been inspired by him. I have tried my best to inculcate his way of life. Sri Ramanujacharya was not just a 'Jnani' or a 'Sage' but was a multi-dimensional personality. His activities included uplifting the



Jeeyar Swamiji inaugurating a music festival along with Ex. Chairman of ISRO, K.Radhakrishnan and former president of India, APJ Abdul Kalam during Vid. RK Srikantan memorial day. Also seen in the picture are RS Kumar and RS Ramakanth

society, propagating our great music, Temple management, Managing the administration of mutt, Personality development, etc. There have been times when he has personally attended and helped the downtrodden. He exhibited immaculate leadership qualities.

I am conscious of the 'benchmark' set by him and trying to closely follow him. My aim for 'Sri Mutt' is not just religious activities but those that uplift society in general. While spiritual and religious activities continue as a primary activity, we want to have a wider reach with people by being part of them and solving their problems.

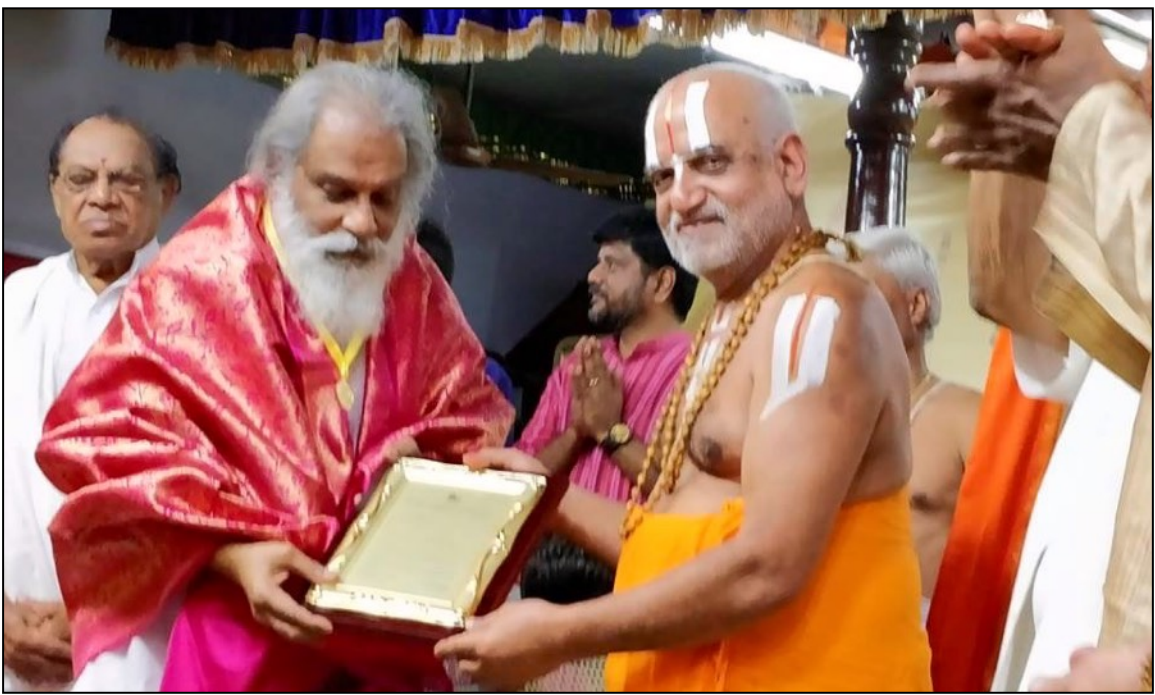
My daily activities are packed. Every day after my evening 'anushtanam' and 'Japam', I start listening to pure Karnatic classical music by around 9 pm. and it goes up to 12.30 or 1 am. I have further attempted to organise the concerts for listening based on the ragas with an intention to understand how different maestros have handled the same raga but with a different kriti and their own signature manodharma passages. I have gained a lot by this process and it has given me a very structured knowledge of Karnatic music. I further advise all young practitioners of music to adopt this method so that they can also benefit.

LKT: You have taken a special interest in conducting music concerts and also institutionalised music programs at 'Sri Mutt' in

Malleswaram. The 'music shibira' is unique wherein you invite top-notch musicians to perform. Please tell us about this.

Jeeyar Swamiji: 'Sri Ramanuja Kalakshetra', the cultural wing of 'Sri Mutt' manages the music concerts at the mutt. Many up-coming and senior artistes aspire to come and perform in my presence at the 'Kutira' (a cabin inside the 'Sri Mutt' premises) which provides a chamber music kind of environment. I am overwhelmed by their talent and generously encourage them. 'Dolotsavam' is performed to our mutt deity Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swami every month on 'Swathi Nakshatram' during which a musical offering is made to the Lord by way of a concert at the sannidhi. Special concerts are conducted during 'Narasimha Jayanthi'. Our 'Margazhi Sangeethotsava' concert series was started in the year 2012 and is conducted during the first week of Margazhi month before the commencement of Thiruppavai Upanyasam. These concerts are very popular and draw a large number of rasikas as they are similar to the December season in Chennai which is unique in Bangalore.

There have been 'Music Shibira' (music camp) like the 'Yatiraja Naada Sangama', 'Raaga Darshana', 'Vaggeya Darshana' that is attended by eminent musicians to the young musicians. These programs have come in for special praise by the patrons of music. In fact, I am told that



KJ Jesudas receiving the Sangeetha Kalasarathy Award for 2017 from Jeeyar Swamiji at the Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha

no Sangeetha sabha anywhere has conducted such a special feature as 'Raaga Darshana' covering 14 ragas in 14 days.

Apart from music, Sri Mutt through the 'Integrated Rural Development Project' is committed to improving the infrastructure at Thondanoor village aimed at improving the ease of living of the people. We are helping the Thondanoor village with Solar lamps, roads, etc. Students are given scholarships to help with their education. Selected eminent people at Sri Mutt are also tutoring the Thondanoor school students online. We have seen that our tutoring is helping students score better. 'Sri Ramanuja Pension Scheme' provides life support to the downtrodden where our staff personally deliver pensions to the neediest people. We are also maintaining two 'goshala' that has over 100 cows of different breeds. Our idea ultimately is to convert Thondanoor village into a 'Smart Village' and in the process improve education, health, personality/skill of people, etc., and overall infrastructure.

LKT: This edition of Lalitha Kala Tarangini is dedicated to Nagaswaram. Going back to our 'Sanatana Dharma', how did Nagaswaram find a place in the religious activities of the temple?

Jeeyar Swamiji: From time immemorial, Nagaswaram music is closely associated with the Temple rituals. It is considered a 'Mangala Vadya', an auspicious instrument. There are no rituals without Nagaswaram in temples. There are rituals in temples where the priests direct the Nagaswaram vidwan to play a specific raga for example during the 'Dwajaroohanam' ritual of 'Brahmotsavam'. That is how tightly the Nagaswaram and temple rituals are integrated.

LKT: You have led the Sri Mutt to many progressive spiritual and religious activities aiming to further society and humanity at large. To commemorate the Saint reformer Sri Ramanujacharya's visit to Kashmir and the creation of 'Sri Bhashya', Sri Mutt is planning to install a statue of Sri Ramanujacharya in Kashmir. Please enumerate the thoughts behind this historic event.

Jeeyar Swamiji: Of the 9 religious works (books) that Sri Ramanujacharya completed, 'Sri Bhashya' is the most important book. The original transcript (Brahmasutra of Sage Vyasa) was available only in 'Saraswathi Bandara' in Kashmir. Sri Ramanujacharya along with his two disciples (Dasarathi and Kuresa) visited Kashmir on foot all the way. Sri Ramanuja was only allowed to see the transcript but not take notes



Jeeyar Swamiji being honoured

or allowed to carry the manuscript out of Kashmir. His disciples had a photographic memory and committed the entire text to their memory. After returning to Srirangam, Sri Ramanujacharya was able to write 'Bhashyam' with the help of his disciples. Sri Ramanujacharya subsequently goes to Kashmir and offers the work to Goddess Saraswathi. Goddess Saraswathi was so pleased that she refers to Sri Ramanujacharya as 'Bhashyakara' and his work as 'Sri Bhashyam'.

To re-establish Sri Ramanujacharya's connection with Kashmir, Sri Mutt will be installing the statue of Sri Ramanujacharya in Kashmir. It has been a compelling project for the last three years and I am glad it will be completed on 07 July 2022. The statue is being carved out of white marble at Jaipur and once installed, it will be called 'Statue for Peace'. I believe this will be a significant tribute to Sri Ramanujacharya.

Nagaswaram and Temple tradition - some salient aspects

Reference - video on Rasika Ranjani Sabha's YouTube page

Nagaswaram vidwan Idumbavanam V Prakash Ilayaraja, and Lalitharam Ramachandran, author gave a Lec-Dem on the Nagaswaram and Temple tradition. Some excerpts from the same are reproduced below;

1. From time immemorial, Nagaswaram has been part of the temple tradition to broadcast to people far away that a temple ritual is being performed. For example 'Thaligai Mallari' signifies prasadam being offered to the deity and 'Theertha Mallari'

is played when abhishekam is being performed.

2. Temple Nagaswaram requires mastering temple tradition repertoire as each ritual is associated with a specific composition or the Mallari.
3. While there is a specific repertoire set for 'nitya karma' (daily proceedings), there is also a specific repertoire set for the Festivals and Utsavams.

4. During temple festivals, Chinna Mallari and Periya Mallari are played. Periya Mallari is long-drawn, set to Tripura Tala, and is very intricate with its own Tisram and Trikalam (speed variations). At times, artistes employ their own manodharmam in addition to Tisram and Trikalam. Temple festival events normally take a long time so the Mallaris by its nature fit perfectly during these festivals. Mallaris are not performed on concert stage for the same reason.
 5. While important temples have retained a permanent Nagaswaram group, many temples do not have a dedicated group.
 6. Taval employs very complicated and technical musical phrases. It has its own fan following due to its beautiful sound, the skill of the artistes, and the ambience of the temple.
 7. It is always a tradition that Taval is played before a Mallari is played by Nagaswara Vidwan. Taval vidwans usually play a pattern of 5 (khandam) before Nagaswaram starts. This serves as an announcement that a temple ritual is about to commence and this tradition is followed in all Shaiva as well as Vaishnavatemples.
 8. Different ragas are played depending on the ritual being performed and they normally extend for a long duration. Nagaswaram artistes have the opportunity to pick up a raga and employ all their creativity and play for hours together. Many vocal artistes have imbibed the essence of the ragas by listening to Nagaswaram artistes.
 9. Unlike a traditional concert, raga need not start from madhya sthayi (middle octave) and move on to tara sthayi (upper octave). Nagaswaram artistes choose an octave and elaborate and then move on to another octave (s). Time is not a constraint here. Nagaswaram legends have taken up a single raga and played it all night long.
 10. When the deity is taken over the stairs (padi yetram), they pause on each step for a few seconds. During this process, the Nagaswaram vidwans switch ragas between each step and this music forms a wonderful ragamalika suite.
 11. Nagaswara Vidwans also employ ragas depending on the time of the day. While Bhoopalam, Malayamarutham are played before dawn, Neelambari is played at midnight. Here is the typical raga schedule;
 - 04-06 am: Bhoopalam, Malayamarutham, Valaji, Mayamalavagowla
 - 06-08 am: Bilahari, Kedaram, Jaganmohini, Sudha Dhanyasi
 - 08-10 am: Dhanyasi, Saveri, Devamanohari
 - 10 am -12 noon: Suruti, Sri, Manirangu
 - 02-04 pm: Nattaikuranji, Huseni, Ravichandrika
 - 04-06 pm: Poorvi Kalyani, Vasantha, Lalitha, Kalyani
 - 06-08 pm: Sankarabharana, Bhairavi, Kharaharapriya
 - 08-10 pm: Kamboji, Shanmukhapriya, Thodi, Natabhairavi
 - 10 pm-12 am: Charukesi, Simhendramadhyam and end with Neelambari
 12. The Nagaswaram vidwans are so accustomed to this schedule that they also abide by the same raga schedule in their sabha concerts.
 13. During the festivals that span a few days, specific ragas are to be performed depending on the day. Typically, the first day would be Sankarabharana or Hamsadhvani, the second day could be Reethigowla, and Chakravakam played on the third day, etc.
- It is hoped that Rasikas will educate themselves on Nagaswaram-Temple Tradition and appreciate their music, especially in a temple setting at par with other musical forms so that this divine music is carried forward to subsequent generations. It will do a lot of good to include Nagaswaram in our own religious and auspicious programs. This definitely is an urgent need considering the temple festivals have been drastically scaled-down.

ESTD - 1955

SRI RAMA LALITHA KALA MANDIRA (R.)

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SPRING MUSIC FESTIVAL - 2022



60th Year Punya Smarane

of

Sri G Vedantha Iyengar,

Visionary Founder, Sri Mandira

3rd May 2022 To 15th May 2022



Life sketch of Nagaswara Vidwan Karukurichi P Arunachalam

*Original article by Dr. BM Sundarm written for the book 'Nindrolirum Minnal' in Tamil
Translation credit - Sudha Balachandran, Bangalore*



The most noted and renowned Nagaswaram player in entire Tamilnadu is none other than Sri Karukurichi Arunachalam. He was born in the year 1921 in the small town of Karukurichi in Thirunelveli district. None in his family were musicians; his ancestors were merchants of seeds and grains. Arunachalam's father was Sri Balavesam. On one occasion, one of the prominent landlords of Karukurichi was celebrating a wedding in his family. He had invited Sri Ku-

rainadu Natesa Pillai, a noted Nagaswaram player, to perform at the wedding. Balavesam happened to sit in the 'thinai' or front porch of the building where Natesa Pillai was staying and was engaged in making a garland of flowers.

A messenger came in search of Natesa Pillai to inform that the landlord had sent him. The bridegroom was ready and Natesa Pillai was needed at the marriage hall to play the Nagaswaram. Natesa Pillai informed the messenger that he would be in the hall within ten minutes. But he remained seated and did not make an attempt to go. The landlord sent a couple of more messengers to fetch Natesa Pillai but still he did not stir. Balavesam was watching all this and thought to himself - the landlord is a short-tempered person and will not forgive people who do not keep to their word. I wonder what calamity awaits this Natesa Pillai. And like he anticipated, the landlord himself came to the house and approached Natesa Pillai. Seeing the landlord, Natesa Pillai remarked that he would come to the wedding hall in just a few minutes. Balavesam expected angry fireworks but was astonished to see that the landlord did not get angry and very politely requested Natesa Pillai to join the wedding at his convenience.

Balavesam was intrigued and thought "what a great skill this Natesa Pillai possesses. He commands so much respect. I too will learn to play the Nagaswaram; then people will start respecting me."

Balavesam immediately sought out a famous Nagaswaram player from the village of Cheranmahadevi and became his disciple. But despite



his passion and willingness to learn, his circumstances and advancing age prevented him from learning it properly. So he decided that instead of him his son Arunachalam would learn the art and thus fulfil his desire.

Arunachalam started learning Nagaswaram from Sri Suthumalli Subbaiah Kambar. He also learnt Carnatic vocal music from Kalakkadu Subbaiah Bagavathar. Soon he started mastering the art form and was getting chances to per-

form in kutcheris. But his relatives were not convinced or happy that he should become a Nagaswaram player. They criticised and discouraged both his father and him and urged them to stop the madness and instead take up the regular family profession. But Arunachalam was not swayed by their negativity. He wanted to learn more - especially from the renowned musicians of Tanjore. He had heard of Sri Thiruvadurai Rajarathinam Pillai, a doyen in the industry and the most prominent of Nagaswaram vidwans. He was famously known as 'Nagaswaram Chakravarthi'. Arunachalam desired to become his disciple but sadly he did not know how to meet or get introduced to the renowned maestro.

A propitious opportunity presented itself. Rajarathinam Pillai visited Karukurichi to perform at an event organised by a prominent landlord. His fellow disciple and musician Kaakkai Natraja Sundaram who was supposed to play with him, took ill. Rajarathinam then asked Sri Mani Sharma if he knew any boy who could play the Nagaswaram for that concert. Mani Sharma knew of Arunachalam's wish to learn from the maestro and so immediately got him to meet Rajarathinam. This proved to be the turning point in Arunachalam's life. Rajarathinam was impressed by Arunachalam's prowess and told him to stay with him and learn the art form.

Thus, Arunachalam's desire to learn from the great musician was fulfilled and he became his disciple on 28-6-1935. Rajarathinam did not believe in giving solo lessons. Arunachalam had to learn the nuances by watching and hearing the master play both at home and in concerts. Arunachalam lost no time in doing this and soon picked up and mastered several aspects like Raga aalapanas, keerthanas. Praise, prizes, awards and accolades started coming his way. He became a popular artiste and attained fame. But in the midst of all this, Arunachalam remained humble and did not develop an ego. He was the epitome of humility. He had a great fan-following - prominent people like Thambikottai Pannaiya Balasubramanya Thevar took a great liking for Arunachalam and arranged many concerts.



He was invited by Madras Music Academy to perform in their music festival. His concert was aired by All India Radio and the programme went on till 12 midnight. People were happy to stay up and listen to him despite the late hour.

Thus the saying 'a father desires and the son fulfils' became true in Balavesam and Arunachalam's case. He grew up to be one of the greatest Nagaswaram vidwans of the country. He built a house in Kovilpatti and lived there. He got his daughters married while his only son Saravanan took up employment with the TVS Group.

Several reputed Thavil players accompanied Arunachalam in his concerts like Thirumulaivoyal Muthuveer Pillai, Kumbakonam Thangavel Pillai, Natchiarkoil Raghava Pillai, Valangaiman Shanmugasundara Pillai, Vadapathimangalam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai, Perumpallam Venkatesha Pillai, Karanthai Shanmukha Pillai, Needaman-galam Shanmuga Vadivel Pillai, Yazhpanam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai. Arunachalam also had his music recorded in gramophone vinyl records, and played in movies. The movie 'Konjum Salan-

gai' had the famous song 'Singaravelane deva'... sung by S Janaki with Nagaswaram played by Arunachalam.

I distinctly remember the first time I met Arunachalam. It was in the year 1945 when my brother and I were studying in a school in Mayiladuthurai. Our uncle, the legendary Rajarathinam Pillai sent for us to join him in his house in Thiruvaduthurai. It was school holidays and so we decided to go across to his house. There were several people already assembled there. The famous film actress, Shantha Apte was also present. She praised our Uncle and said he was such a well-known figure in the music and film industry. She requested him to play the Thodi raga. Uncle asked a young boy standing in the corner to come forward and play the raga. The boy shyly picked up his instrument and went about playing the Thodi raga. After a few minutes, Shantha said that she wanted to listen to my Uncle's style of performing Thodi to which Uncle replied that the boy was actually playing Thodi in exactly his own style.

When I asked my Uncle who the young boy was, he replied that 'this boy is from Thirunelveli his name is Arunachalam and he has been learning under me for the last 10 years.'

I was surprised to see that Arunachalam played the Nagaswaram exactly like my Uncle. I thought then that he will certainly be one of my Uncle's best disciples along with Kaakkayi Nataraja Sundaram! and that was exactly what happened!

The next time I met Sri Arunachalam was in Madras when his concert was aired live by All India Radio. The concert went on till 12:00 midnight. My brother and Sri Yazhpanam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai accompanied Arunachalam on the thavil. I also remember visiting Sri Arunachalam at his house in Kovilpatti along with my elder brother.

For a brief period, Sri Arunachalam stayed in Thanjavur, right behind my house. I remember those days distinctly. On the days he did not have concerts, he would visit my house almost everyday from 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon and we

would sit and enjoy talking about Nagaswaram and music. My brother would also join in these memorable sessions and we would discuss all aspects of music. Sri Arunachalam also immensely liked the music of another great nagaswara vidwan - Late Sri Kottur Rajarathinam. We would discuss the music of that legendary master too.

Sri Arunachalam's passion and desire to learn music was ever present. Once he heard my brother sing the song Himagiri Thanaye.. composed by Muthaiah Bhagavathar. Sri Arunachalam learnt it instantly and sang the same song right away. Similarly on one occasion, I sang a Thillana composed by Tanjore Ponnaiah. Arunachalam learnt it quickly and sang it. Not to be outdone, my brother said 'I can also sing a thillana' and he proceeded to sing one in Chenchurutti raga composed by Mysore Veenai Seshanna. Sri Arunachalam learnt this too and sang it for us.

Once Sri Madurai Somasundaram was singing in the Vinayaka temple in Thanjavur. Arunachalam heard him sing the song through the loud speaker - *Yenna Kavi Paddinalum* - which was composed by Sri Anaiyampatti Adishesha Iyer. He had not heard it before. He promptly came to me and asked me to sing the song while he noted down the swaras. A week later, at his next kutcheri in Dindigul, he performed the same song for which my brother also played the thavil.

I remember his son-in-law, Sri Mounaguru Swamy had once arranged a concert in Palani. Sri Arunachalam invited us in person to attend the same and I did. There at the concert, after playing on the Nagaswaram, he also sang the song. Without being egoistic, he announced that the song was taught to him by his friend Needamangalam Shanmuga Vadivel. He was a true learner and did not hesitate to thank and give credit to the person who taught him. He never stopped learning.

There was another incident that took place when Sri Arunachalam was supposed to perform in the Raja Annamalai Hall in Madras. It was again slated to be aired by All India Radio

and my brother Sri Shanmuga Vadivel was supposed to accompany him on the thavil. I came to the concert hall to stop my brother from performing. Hearing this, Sri Arunachalam approached me and asked me why I was not allowing my brother to perform. I told him how "my brother was supposed to have been selected to perform by AIR Trichy. But they did not have a senior musician to grade him. So when he could not perform with AIR Trichy, how can he now perform for an AIR concert in Madras?" Hearing the commotion, Sri Sethuram Iyer, a senior official of AIR immediately intervened and promptly readied an agreement in favour of my brother. After this, the concert went on smoothly. At the same concert, I also got the opportunity to meet the legendary Thavil player Sri Yazhpanam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai - who I consider as the 8th wonder of the world!

My brother and I have always been in close touch with Sri Arunachalam. He invited us to the Gruhapravesham function of his Kovilpatti house and entrusted his son Saravanan to personally take care of us. Once, he took me along to meet Vilathikulam Nalliseyyam Swamigal to get his blessings.

We heard the news of Sri Arunachalam's death on 7-4-1964 and were deeply depressed. News of his death affected all his fans and several generations who had grown up listening to the divine music flowing from his Nagaswaram agrieved at the loss of the legend. My brother-in-law, noted thavil player, Sri Natchiyar Kovil Raghava Pillai was completely heart broken. He lamented 'now for whom will I play the thavil' and he too passed away.

Sri Arunachalam will be remembered for eternity as one of the greatest Nagaswaram players. His name will be etched in the music hall of fame and his fans will always remember him as the rightful heir to carry on the legacy of the Nagaswaram maestro Thriuvaduthurai Rajarathinam. And as a person, he will be remembered as a humble human being, who remained unaffected by the fame and wealth that he obtained - 'arrogance' was a word not found in his dictionary!

Sri Vishvanatha Kavi, the author of Gita Gangeyam

Rajani Arjun Shankar, Chennai

Amongst the many books inspired by Gita Govindam of Jayadeva, some of the well-known ones are Rama Ashtapadi, and Shivageetimaalaa. These celebrate Rama and Sita, and Shiva and Parvati as the hero and heroine of their work, respectively. One of the recent additions to such works, is the Gita Gangeyam, which has been written in the first half of the 20th Century, CE.

The author of this work is Sri Vishvanatha Kavi, who resided in Kaanaadukaathan and in Kundrakudi, in Tamil Nadu, India. He was born circa 1890 CE, and lived till around the age of sixty. His parents were Sri Ramasubramanya Sarma and Balambal, and they were residents of the Shivapuram Agraharam, in Srigokarnam. Srigokarnam (Tirugokarnam in Tamil) is an important temple in Pudukkottai, and Goddess Parvati, known there as Bruhadamba, is the tutelary deity of the Tondamaan kings who ruled from Pudukkottai in the past few centuries. The Kavi's family worshipped Lord Subrahmanya in Vaideeswaran Koil, and later in Kumaramalai (a small hill shrine near Pudukkottai) as their family deity. Later when he started residing in places around Kundrakudi, the family embraced Lord Subrahmanya of Kundrakudi as their chosen deity. In fact, he has composed Gita Gangeyam in praise of Lord Subrahmanya of Kundrakudi, which is also known as Mayuragiri. He has used synonyms for the place, such as Shikhi-shaila, Mayura-bhudhara etc. in the work.

Sri Vishvanatha Kavi completed his studies in the Vedas and became a Ghanapaathi. He was an Adhyaapaka (instructor) of the Vedas in the Vedapathashala in a village called Uyyakkondaan Siruvayal (now known as O. Siruvayal). He was

also well-versed in the Valmiki Ramayana and used to conduct discourses on the Ramayana. In the Tamil month of Aippasi (Ashvayuji), he also held readings of the Tulaa Puraanam, which extols the greatness of River Kaaveri. Apart from these, he was also a Shaabdika (grammarian), who could perform Ashtaavadhaanam in Vyaakarana (i.e. he could pay attention to and respond to eight different kinds of queries simultaneously posed to him regarding grammar). He was also devoted to his spiritual routine and would not eat until he completed his Shiva Panchayatana Puja everyday. He had great devotion towards Mahasvami of Kanchi, as well as towards Kutraalam Mouna Svami, whose Math he would occasionally visit and spend a month or so in.

Family members of Sri Vishvanatha Kavi recall that when they later went to have Darshan, Kanchi Mahasvami told them about him, and enquired if they had learnt anything from him. It is also said that the Mahasvami directed some people with doubts in some texts to Sri Vishvanatha Kavi for clarifications.

About fifty years ago, the family (then living in Thirumeyyam) had a visitor from the French Institute of Puducherry, who wanted to collect the works of Kavi. When they searched the ancestral house in Kundrakudi, the room was seen to be invaded by termites. The few available manuscripts were taken by the visitor to the French Institute. Those works were in the Grantha script, it is said. As of now, the only work available to us is the Gita Gangeyam.



Sri Vishvanatha Kavi with his wife, son, daughter-in-law, grandson and children of extended family

Sri Vishvanatha Kavi was married to Smt. Meenakshi. Having no children, the couple adopted his brother's son Sri Ramanathan. Sri Ramanathan completed his Vedic studies upto Ghana, and also mastered South Indian Classical music, having taken lessons from Sri Kottaiyur Ramachandra Bhaagavata. Sri Ramanathan's younger son Sri Meenakshisundaram is a musician and music teacher, and his son, Sri Kundrakudi M. Balamuralikrishna is a well-known vocalist today.

The immensely famous violinist of yesteryears, Kunnakkudi R. Vaidyanathan, also belongs to this family. His father Sri Ramaswamy was another younger brother of Sri Vishvanatha Kavi.

Sri Vishvanatha Kavi spent his later years with his son's family in Keezha-Poongudi. Till the end he continued his teaching and discourses. He was unwell only for a week before he passed away.

The Gita Gangeyam is a short Kavya, a great work filled with charming verses, that describes the sports of Lord Subrahmanya (Gangeya) and

His younger consort Sri Valli. Although modelled after Gita Govindam, it has a rare beauty of its own. It has 24 Ashtapadis (songs with 8 stanzas) in differing rhythms and has some Shlokas before and after each Ashtapadi. These Shlokas are set in a variety of Chandas (metres) and have amazing descriptions of Nature, the heroic deeds of Subrahmanya and various nuances of the emotions of love. Many are simply sublime prayers to Him.

The book was published in 1982 by Murugan Tiruvartu Sangam of Chennai, under the guidance of musician and scholar Sri TS Vasudevan. It was made part of the Guha Bhajana Sampradaya and published in the book of Harihara-guha Bhajana Sampradaya published by Sri AK Gopalan Bhagavata. Later it was also published by Pranatartihara Bhajana Mandali of Bengaluru and then by Dr. P Siva of Hyderabad. Reconciling these four sources, this book has now been uploaded online in www.sanskritdocuments.org, under the Stotras of Subrahmanya. We hope many will read and appreciate this beautiful Kavya and musicians will add songs from it in their repertoire.

Note : Some of the lesser known words have been spelt here with double a's to aid their correct pronunciation.

In 1929, Rajarathnam Pillai was in Tirunelveli to play at a wedding in the house of Palayamkotai Lappaji Venkataraman, a wealthy landlord. On arrival, Rajarathnam told the host he would not play during the procession unless platforms were erected at various places to enable him to perform seated. The host had to comply. With this experience behind him, Rajarathnam began insisting that he would perform only seated on platforms. He began to do so even when he had to play in processions of temple deities; he demanded that a platform be arranged atop a lorry that would move along with the procession.

-Source Sruti, Dec 1998

Tavil - a perspective

Dr. BM Sundaram, Musicologist, Pondicherry

Our Bharata desa has the greatness of having a number of musical instruments, though many of them are now extinct. Works on music classify musical instruments as Tanthi (Stringed), Sushira (Wind), Avanaddha (Percussive made of wood and leather) and Kamsya (Brass). Among them Sushira (Nagasvaram, Flute etc.) and Avanaddha (Tavil, Mrudangam, Kanjira etc.) gained prominence. The percussive instruments have been used on various occasions and in various places to keep rhythm of music perfect. In the Karnatic system, most of these are used only to accompany the melodic path of music, while some of them have contributed immensely to the development of arithmetical permutations and combinations. Nagasvaram and Tavil have a unique part in the development of Karnatic music. The South Indian temples are to be proud in having a variety of instruments, both melodic and rhythmic particularly the Nagasvaram and Tavil. These two came up for musical service in temples, in the beginning of history and later used for various auspicious occasion and events. We cannot certainly say when the Nagasvaram came into existence. Some early works on music mention this was quite in existent, even during the Rig Vedic Times. One Tamil work says, “Rukku vedattile ninrezhu nagasvarattin totram...”. Later it gained a number of names like “Uttaala Venu” (vertical flute). On the basis of scholarly research, we could certainly say that Tavil, the percussive, was born with Nagasvaram and these two were used for Temple services. Now let us see about this great percussive instrument, Tavil, which has served with unimaginable rhythmic wonders.

Old works on musicology say that this instrument was discovered by Ravana, King of Lanka, to wake up the sleeping Kumbhakarna (kumb-

hakaarnasya bodhaartham Raavanena vinirmitam). The name of this instrument, perhaps at that time was Dindima. In the Vaishnavite Agamas like ‘Sree Prasna Samhita’, this has been mentioned as Maddukam. As said earlier, this has been in use as the prime accompaniment to Nagasvaram, since very early times. In many Kannada and Telugu works, this has been given the name Dolu, which later got changed to Tavil. We find the name Dolu in many Persian works too. ‘Dolu’, in general, means ‘hanging from the shoulder’ or ‘a swing’. The term Tavil is found first used in Saint Arunagirinathar’s Tiruppugazh (Muzhavu valai bheri kanapparai Tavil). In a very early Tamil work also we find the usage (Tan-numai Tavil Tadari). The Tamil word ‘Tavil’, when split, gives the meaning as, ‘Ta’ (blemish) and ‘il’ (without). So, Tavil simply means ‘a blemishless instrument’.

In the making of Tavil, jackwood that reverberates the temple bell’s sound is most preferable and even today only this wood is used. Goat’s skin for one side (Valantalai) and buffalo’s skin for the other side (the idantalai or Toppi) is found to be used. The valantalai or the side played by finger is named ‘Vandodari’ and the other side as ‘Gundodari’ in earlier tamil works. But, both these names have gone with the wind and only Valantalai and Toppi have come to stay. This is the only percussive instrument that has eleven ‘eyes’ (holes to insert leather straps to tighten). They represent ‘Ekadasa Rudra’ (perhaps this was a discovery of Ravana, a devotee of Lord Shiva).

The basic syllables for Tavil are seven, like the Sapta Swaras, - “Ta dhi tom nam ki ta jham”. Another uniqueness of this instrument is the syllables are produced only at the particular

spot. Even while playing at an incredible Speed, the syllables are to be counted only at the exact spots, as taught during the primary lessons. For instance, mridangam, syllable, 'Dhi' is played on the right side (valantalai), during the initial lessons, but while executing the same in a fast tempo, it sounded on the Toppi too.

In this way also, Taval has a unique place. Taval is called 'Yemabheri' in Sri Lanka, since before the flag hoisting for any festival in the temples, this instrument is taken to the cremation ground (an abode of Lord Siva!) and performed pujas by Temple priest, who will carry it on his shoulder, sounding 'Tom' on the Toppi with the stick and later handed over to the original Taval player. Then only the temple flag will be hoisted. Perhaps this is the reason for the prayers to begin the sounding of the Taval with the syllable 'Tom' (Totom tom tom tom) on any occasion.

It is quite common in a Nagaswara ensemble, Nagaswara is the main instrument, it begins only

with the playing of the Taval. This is the tradition, which cannot be found in any vocal or instrumental concert, around the globe. Only after the song is commenced, the percussive instrument joins the main performer and accompanies. But this unique tradition, Taval the percussive instrument, par excellence should lead the Nagaswara ensemble (Melam) cannot be found anywhere else. By the way, there is a wrong usage of the term 'Melam' to Taval. The Taval player is described as 'Melakkaran' by many commoners. 'Melam' is nothing but a 'union' (The Sanskrit root 'mil' denotes 'joining', 'uniting' etc.). So, any group or musical ensemble is a 'Melam'.

Some other instruments like the Mrudanga have a pitch value and hence a short syllable, for instance, 'jham' or 'Dhin' is pleasant to hear, whereas it is not possible in the case of the Taval. Hence, to attract the listeners, the Taval player has to start his playing and introducing the arithmetic even at the outset. Usually, he starts with "Totom tom tom toto tom tom tom

Annual Spring Music Festival and SRLKM awards 2022

SRLKM hosted the annual spring music festival 2021 in the month of May. It was a thirteen-day music festival and was held in the Bangalore Gayana Samaja from the 3rd of May to the 15th of May. SRLKM held a very simple function on Sunday 8th May 2022 to give away the "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhureena" award, the "Raga Laya Prabha Awards" as well as the "Pallavi Sammela" awards. The function was held in the presence of His Holiness Sri Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamiji of Yathiraja mutt, Melukote.

Vidwan Kumaresh Rajagopalan presented the Raga Laya Prabha as well as the Pallavi Sammela awards to the artistes.

The coveted award "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhureena" instituted in the memory of the

visionary founder of SRLKM G Vedantha Iyengar was given to Vid. Dr. Jayanthi Kumaresh. The award carries a purse of rupees one lakh, a silver medal, and a citation.

Also, the 'Raga Laya Prabha' award with a cash purse of rupees Twenty Five Thousand was given to eight young promising artistes from Karnataka. They are Vivek Sadashivam for Vocal, Rahul Vellal for Vocal, Spoorthi Rao for Vocal, Aishwarya Manikarnike for Veena, Vishnu Venkatram for Violin, Anoor Vinod Shyam for Mridanga, Bhagyalakshmi M Krishna for Murching and Somashekhar Jois for Konnakol.

(See centre spread and back cover page for photos)

tata tata..." and while ending that phrase, he introduces Gati Bhedam, "tomtom kita tomtomta tam" (Trayasra gati) or a phrase in some other gati. Here the introduction of the Taval play has arithmetical usage. Only after playing on the Taval for few minutes, the Nagasvaram enters the scene. Even if the Nagasvaram player is ready, he will wait for the Taval play and then only begin.

Taval, though an 'Asura Vadya' is very tender. There are certain disciplines observed, as far as this instrument is concerned. No woman, in general, or particularly one in her monthly periods is allowed to go near the instrument (she need not touch the instrument) in the player's house, when he has to work or during the tightening of the leather straps on that instruments for a concert. If such a thing happens, immediately the leather or the Valantalai or the Toppi will tear off. Similarly, none is allowed to stand on one leg, keeping the other leg on the nearby wall, particularly when the leather straps are tightened, and in that case too the same calamity will follow. That's why the Taval is praised as the 'blemish-less' and tender.

The contribution of the Taval to the arithmetical side of rhythmic play being the 'margadarsi' to other percussive instrument is also phenomenal. Today, we find many mridangam players, for that matter, going on 'unloading' heaps of

'Vyavaharam' (arithmetical executions) during the so called, 'Tani'. Some do that even between Pallavi and Anupallavi or Charana, during the singing of the vocalist or instrumental playing. Taval is the 'path-blower' for this. Since this instrument is pitch-less, the Taval player is compelled to introduce arithmetics, whereas it is not so in the case of Mrudangist. Hence we may jolly well assert and aver that arithmetics in the execution of the rhythmic phrases is a contribution of the Taval player. If we boast today, that the rhythmic part of the Carnatic Music is at the highest level, enviable for other percussive instruments of the world, the credit should go to none other than the Taval players.

(Dr. BM Sundaram is respectfully called Best Musicologist Sundaram and has a passion for research in music. He commands high level of respect in the music fraternity and has written several books on Music.

He was actively involved in the Thyagabrahma Sabha of Thanjavur and is a very busy man today. We are grateful to Dr. BM Sundaram to have provided his thoughts in this special edition on Nagasvaram),

SRLKM's Pallavi Sammela

SRLKM conducted their annual Pallavi Sammela competition-2022 in March. Fourteen participants were selected to take part in the competition and it was conducted on two successive days. The competition was very tough with all the participants giving their very best. The first prize which carried a purse of Rs.25,000/- was given to vid. Aditi Prahalad and the second prize with a cash award of Rs.15,000/- was given to vid. Lakshmipriya of Chennai. Judges' choice of special prize went

to vid. Aishwarya Manikarnike and vid. Dhanush Anantharaman.

The judges for the competition were vid. Dr. TS Sathyavathi renowned musicologist, performer, and scholar, vainika vidwan D Balakrishna and mridanga vidwan Arjun Kumar. The Pallavi competition was webcast live and it has been uploaded to the SRLKM youtube channel for everyone to enjoy.

(See photos at back cover page)

Tavil and other percussion instruments

KS Kalidas, Chennai

Tavil, Mridangam, Tabla, Dolak, Ghatam, Kanjira, etc. are called percussion instruments in opposition to Violin, Flute, Vocal music, etc. which are melodic in nature. Unless melody and percussion join together 'sangeetam' will not be complete. Now coming to percussion instruments, all the percussion instruments have to be played according to the particular tala chosen by the main performer except there are some small variations in the case of Tavil. Tavil is the only percussion instrument which is played even before the sahitya is rendered. A short Tavil passage with a teermanam is always played after which either the alapana or the kriti rendering is started by the Nagaswaram vidwan. Now in that small piece of Tavil playing, which is a fore-runner of keertana or raga alapana, it is generally played in Chatusra Eka Tala and different varieties of nadais and teermanams are played after which the Nagaswaram starts.

This is essential because Nagaswaram, although generally is played by two persons, breath control is essential and therefore the Tavil inter-ludes. Similarly, even in the midst of the alapana, Tavil playing is continued for about 3-5 min again in Chatusra Eka tala though the main kriti may be in some other tala. However, the laya vinyasam after the main kriti is played in the tala in which the kriti is set. There may be one or two Tavil vidwans playing together in a concert and to the extent possible both will reciprocate one another.

There are certain differences in the tonal qualities of the percussion instruments. The Mridangam and Tavil are both called 'Rajavadhyas', that is kings among percussive instruments.

Mridangam has various tonal qualities like 'din', 'num', 'ta', 'dhom', 'tha', 'ki', 'arai chapu', 'muzhu chapu', 'dheem', and 'ghumki'. In Tavil generally, there are only four tones that are 'tha', 'dhom', 'ki' and 'ta'. A sort of 'ghumki' is also played but that 'ghumki' does not have even a fraction of the effect of that played on the mridangam. The ghumki of the mridangam comes close to that of the Tabla, rarely used in Karnatic music.

Among the percussive instruments, there are certain instruments that are tuned to the basic (adhara) sruti while others are not. The Tuned instruments are Mridangam, Ghatam, Morsing, and Gettu Vadyam, which has now gone out of use.

Does that mean that 'Kanjira' which is a major percussion instrument does not have tuning? NO, it has a sruti of its own but it has no relationship to the adhara sruti. Similar is the case of Dholak and Tavil itself. They are called FREE sruti instruments.

Coming to the origins of Tavil and Mridangam, both have been in existence for many centuries and Tavil has been mentioned often in 'Tirup-pugazh' of Arunagirinathar in 15th century. The Mridangam as we know now has been brought by the Marathi Bhagavathars to South India who spread out in the 17th century.

Mridangam is called 'Rajavadhya' because it has so many distinctive tonal qualities as mentioned above. In the case of Tavil, a weighty and loud sound quality is produced although the number of tones is limited. At times, it can be heard for many kilometres around, especially during nights when the deity is taken around the temple and has an arresting quality. Hence this is also

called 'Rajavadhya'. Taval is also known as 'Yam-abheri'.

Because of the restrictions of the tonal quality, Taval has a large number of very fast sollu-s which are woven into 'kanakku' format. Compared to that, the mridangam is slightly handicapped because one has to integrate not only the strokes but also the tonal quality. So generally, in the Taval the vyavaharam or the 'kanakku' or the grammatical combinations are much more pronounced than in mridangam.

Even today we do find many mridangam vidwans attending Nagaswaram concerts to hear only the 'laya vinyasam' of Taval vidwans. It is inevitable that some influence of Taval has come to mridangam.

Taval playing was widespread throughout South India, to a greater extent in Tanjavur and Pudukkottai regions, for centuries. The mridangam playing in Pudukkottai region and South Tamil Nadu came decades later. One Manpondia Pillai designed the Kanjira, a one-sided instrument where he could play almost everything that was played on Taval with one hand. In Kanjira, he could also produce tonal quality that was not available in Taval like creating a jingling sound by fixing some coins on the periphery of the Kanjira. A sort of ghumki is also possible to be played on the Kanjira more effectively than Taval by using pressure of the non-playing (holding) hand. Similarly, the opening and closing of the mouth of the Ghatam also produces a kind of ghumki. In the recent days Vidwan G Harishankar has brought out many improved techniques of playing the Kanjira.

Although Manpondia Pillai was the inventor of Kanjira, his disciples could play various instruments including Ghatam, Kanjira, Mridangam, etc. Through the interactions with the vidwans of Tanjavur origin, Pudukkottai laya vidwans, especially the second generation artists of Manpondia Pillai, were adept at playing mridangam. Laya-wise both Taval and Mridangam are controlled by Tala and both ensure the kalapramanam. However, it is the strokes that differ between the two instruments.

According to Pazhani Subramania Pillai of Pudukkottai school, who was proficient in playing both mridangam and Kanjira, there are certain special sollu-s that are applicable to different instruments like Taval, Kanjira, Mridangam etc. These special sollu-s are not to be interchanged with other instruments. This, he has stated in a talk over the Trichy All India Radio Station.

That said, great mridanga vidwans of earlier era did adopt certain aspects of Taval and made them fit into mridangam playing style. That they added in order to increase the 'kanakku' content in mridangam playing, especially by vidwans belonging to the Pudukkottai school thereby enabling development of two distinct schools of mridangam playing - the Tanjavur, which followed the Marathi tradition and was generally of a simpler pattern and the Pudukkottai style where apart from tonal quality there were addition 'kanakku' elements. Due to the passage of time and ease of interaction, the two distinctive styles have tended to merge to a certain extent today.



Carnatica and Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha honoured senior musician Vidushi TS Satyavathy on 19th June with the title "Tana Gana Praveena". Cleveland Sri VV Sundaram was the guest of honour. The program coincided with the Pallavi Darbar 2022 at Mylapore Fine Arts Club Hall, Musiri Subramaniam Road, Mylapore, Chennai.

B Ramadasappa-Silver Nagaswaram adorned with golden Chain

Courtesy 'The Hindu' authored by Ranjini Govind, Bangalore



As a young boy, Nagaswaram artist B. Ramadasappa would hope he got at least one meal a day. This past month, after a concert in Mumbai, the septuagenarian asked the organisers why he was being given so much money! “How can I forget my childhood?” he says as his eyes turn moist. “I am fortunate that God gave me the strength not only to wade through tough times of penury, but bestowed me with the strength to hold on to my Nagaswaram to this day. To think that my hands which were denied a morsel during my growing years, are proudly receiving gold coins as awards and honours now...” says the emotional artist.

Life was not a bed of roses for Nagaswaram artist B Ramadasappa. But it was his passion for the art that spurred him on to succeed

Ramdas, as he is affectionately known, lives in Bangalore. The 108-year-old house where he was born has seen a century of music, from the days of his father. One can't miss his 10-ft long showcase that is packed with citations and awards along with his photographs with star musicians and dignitaries.

“Several newspapers have covered my concerts and have written quite a bit about me. What more are you going to write?” Ramdas wonders. Often referred to as ‘Karnataka’s Bismillah Khan,’ his unassuming nature is a virtue one instantly notices even as he expresses his gratitude to his father who was instrumental in his foraying into the world of Nagaswaram. “My father used to say every musical instrument is a vadhya, but only a Nagaswaram is a mangala vadhya. It is this instrument which is played at auspicious occasion, be it a wedding or a kutcheri.”

Rigorous practice

A well-known Nagaswaram artist of his time, Ramdas’ father, Chikka Muniswamappa, insisted on very early morning practice. Much before sunrise, Ramdas would begin his practice, the air resonating with varnams, ragas and kritis. What did the neighbourhood have to say about the decibel levels? “This is where my father’s guidance helped me gain control

over tone and volume. His lessons on subdued blowing and soft stylised touches on the swaras helped me in becoming a restrained performer. Today, when people appreciate the difference in approach while playing for temple processions, on concert platforms or at weddings, I remember my father. The control over the instrument speaks for itself."

Varied presentation

It was more or less an unwritten law that he would continue the family profession, says Ramdas. "It isn't easy to handle the instrument as it calls for a good deal of lung power. If I have stuck to playing my instrument, it's only because of my passion and adoration for the sacred notes that the instrument is associated with."

Ramdas recollects how he used to listen to recordings of Rajarathinam Pillai and Karaikuruchi Arunachalam and improve his style, even as his presentations later saw stalwarts such as Lalgudi Jayaraman and Balamuralikrishna appreciate the merge of violin, veena and mridangam in some of his concerts. His English notes and Veda inclusions in concerts have become a hit with his fans.

Stress on sahitya

Nagaswaram is made from rudrakshi tree that grows mainly in the humid Thanjavur region of Tamil Nadu. That it isn't suited for gamaka-laden presentation is a myth that the maestro broke with his style and knowledge. He made history with his briga-oriented alapanas in rare ragas,

took up kritis that laid stress on sahitya and brought in long vilamba kala sangati stretches in his pallavi.

"If your breath and blow are under control to deal with variations, any kind of kriti can be played on the Nagaswaram," says the musician, who would practise for 18 hours.

"Veena Doraiswamy Iyengar, a producer at AIR, gave me my first break when I was 22 and from then on, I have tasted success year after year." Ramdas has received numerous awards that include the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award, Chowdiah Award, Sangeetha Nrithya Academy Award and the TTK Award that won him a silver Nagaswaram. He is the asthana vidwan of the Venugopalaswamy Temple in Malleswaram, Bangalore. All his five sons play the Nagaswaram.

Serious presentations for an appreciative audience apart, Ramdas feels at home at wedding concerts as the instrument is considered a mangala vadhya. "Can you imagine a wedding without a Nagaswaram producing a soft Bowli, a soothing Nadanamakriya, a bubbly Manirang, an exhilarating Bilahari or a comforting Suddha Dhanyasi?" he says even as his son Govindraj points out that he is booked for two years.

Wearing his celebrity status with humility, the Nagaswaram vidwan hopes more government encouragement would help in preserving a fast dwindling art form.

The Nagaswaram came on to the concert stage in the middle of the 20th century, but the sabha encouragement has not been consistent. It is not an easy instrument to play. It calls for a good deal of lung power, and the brave ones who pursue it are unhappy about the wall of neglect they come up against. At weddings, they play to a noisy crowd rather than an appreciative, music-aware audience. While wedding assignments bring in much-needed money, they are no substitute for the real concert experience. The lavish wedding spenders are not necessarily good paymasters when it comes to dealing with musicians.

Many upper-caste vidwans in Mysore, says Krishna Murthy, would secretly walk-in temple processions just to hear the Nagaswaram. "They thought it was beneath their dignity to listen to music being played by lower caste musicians," he recalls. "But their hearts knew the value of what they were hearing". (Source - from an on-line blog, author details not available)

Thiruvizha Jayashankar on maestro Karukurichi P Arunachalam

*Original article by Thiruvizha Jayashankar written for the book 'Nindrolirum Minnal' in Tamil
Translation credit - Rajani Arjun Shankar, Chennai*



My father Sri Thiruvizha Raghava Panicker, was the Nadaswara Vidwan in the Sri Mahadevar temple in Thiruvakkarai, in Kottayam district of Kerala. We lived near the temple. During the temple's annual ten-day festival, famous vocal and Nadaswaram Vidwans were invited from Tamil Nadu, for the ninth and tenth day festivals. On one such occasion we had Karukurichi Arunachalam's Nadaswaram concert. At that time, I was 17 (in 1955). I had been playing the Nadaswaram since the age of 12, from my school days.

On that day, in the festival for Sri Mahadevar, Karukurichi Arunachalam's concert went on from 5pm to 9 pm. After a couple of songs, he played "Nagumomu" following the request of the Rasikas. He played Abheri Raga for an hour, then

the song and Swaras. Those three hours, everyone, including me, lost track of time and was in a trance-like state. After the concert I wanted to touch his feet and offer my salutations, but due to the large crowd of Rasikas around him, I came home with a heavy heart that I did not receive his blessings. Subsequently, that Abheri Raga and "Nagumomu" song were always in my heart. I used to hear his music on the radio in those days, regularly.

In 1962, I had acquired a B.A Degree and was accompanying my father in concerts. That year, on the 9th day of the annual temple festival, Lord Sri Mahadeva of Thiruvakkarai was on an elephant, with four other elephants surrounding it. He was by Alavattams (circular fans trimmed with peacock feathers etc.), white Chamarais (fly whisks) and a pearl-bedecked umbrella.

That evening, Karukurichi Arunachalam played from 6 pm to 10.30 pm, standing all the while. It was a feast to the eyes and ears. I was standing among the Rasikas, delighting in his music. He started playing Hemavathi Raga, lingering in the upper octave. By chance, I glanced at the elephant carrying the Lord's Utsavamurthi. I saw it standing still, without moving its ears. When he started moving towards the lower octave, it moved its ears. I saw this happen another three or four times and enjoyed seeing this. I saw with my own eyes that the elephant relished the music of Karukurichi Arunachalam's Nadaswaram, like the cows that rejoiced in the music of Lord Sri Krishna's flute.

My father being his good friend, Karukurichi Arunachalam came to our house. While talking



Karukurichi Arunachalam; with Nachiyarkoil Raghavapillai (special thavil), K.M.Arunachalam (Nagaswaram), Ambasamudram Kuzhandhaivel, and Perumpallam Venkatesapillai (thavil) - Photo Credit: From the book 'Nindrolirum Minnal'

to my father, his eyes fell on the photograph of mine, receiving an award from President Dr. Rajendra Prasad. He enquired about it.

My father replied "That's my son. When he was 18, he played Nagaswaram in the All India Radio music competition and won. This is a picture of him receiving the prize"

"What is he doing now?", asked Karukurichi Arunachalam. "He has completed B.A. and accompanies me in playing Nagaswaram", replied my father. He then called for me and told me "Young man! In Tamil Nadu, those who have even completed Class Ten, look down upon this profession and take up other jobs. But you are playing Nagaswaram despite having completed your B.A. and this makes me very happy. May God's grace ever be there upon you !" It was my great fortune to receive such a blessing. That evening, he called me and made me sit near him on the concert stage.

I consider it a boon granted by Lord Shiva, that I could listen to this world-renowned maestro, sitting next to him. The Sankarabharana Raga he played that day, was indeed a jewel (Abharana) worthy of Sankara (Lord Shiva.)

On several occasions I had the good fortune of seeing and hearing him in person. His style of playing was pleasing from start to finish. I used to listen to his records every day. Even if he played film songs, those would be melodious to hear. The emperor of Nadaswara from Thiruvavaduthurai, T.N. Rajaratnam Pillai was like the Himalayas in the world of music. Karukurichi Arunachalam is one of the lofty peaks of this Himalayan range. They continue to shine brilliantly like two stars in the sky.

(PS: The author has used "Avargal" as a respectful suffix to the name of Karukurichi Arunachalam everywhere in the original Tamil article)

It was the wedding of SS Vasan in 1956. Maestro TN Rajarathnam was very ill and so Vasan had asked Karukurichi Arunachalam to perform at the wedding. Arunachalam was a great artiste in his own right but on the wedding day, early in the morning, a car wriggled through a number of obstacles to stop at the main entrance of the marriage pandal and out stepped Rajarathnam Pillai, resplendently dressed! The great musician slowly made his way to the platform set apart for Nagaswaram players. He said "For a wedding in Iyer's house (meaning Vasan's son's marriage) who but me would play the Nagaswaram?". Vasan hurried to great Rajarathnam who had by then picked up his instrument to play.

Source - Four Score & More, The History of The Music Academy, Madras

Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai

Dr. BM Sundaram, Pondicherry



In the field of the Percussion instrument, Tavil, there was only one among all others, who was a non-pareil in the art and who gave a great honour to the instrument and gained honour himself with the help of this instrument. He was Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai, who created history. The term 'Tavilkarar' meant only

him. Sir CP Ramasvami Iyer once said that "it will be enough if you only say Meenakshisundaram Pillai, you will know the entire history of Tavil".

Saundaravalli Ammal, who belonged to Tirukkolampudur, a small village near Tiruvarur got married in Needamangalam and moved over there. She got four sons and three daughters. The eldest among them was Needamangalam Govinda Pillai, a Tavil maestro and the asthana vidvan of Mysore. The third child was Deivayanai Ammal, wife of Subramanyam. All the male members of this family were only Tavil artistes. To this Deivayanai Ammal was born Meenakshisundaram on 3.9.1894. On the twenty seventh day of the child's birth, Deivayanai Ammal passed away. So it became the responsibility of her younger sister, Kamalam Ammal, to take care of this new born child. Meenakshisundaram's maternal uncle, Singaram Pillai started to teach the young boy, born in Simha lagna, when he attained five years of age. On observing the quick grasping power and the ability to repeat what all taught without any flaw, another uncle, Govinda Pillai took charge of training the ward himself. When he was just nine years old, Meenakshisundaram was taken as a Tavil player by a local nagasvara vidvan, Singaram Pillai in his troupe. After few years, Meenakshisundaram joined the troupe of Mannargudi Narayanasvami Pillai.

The very great Nagasvara vidvan, Nagapattanam Venugopala Pillai was in search of a competent Tavil player for his troupe. Once when he was staying in his brother in law, Kottur Saundararaja Pillai's house, the latter suggested the name of Meenakshisundaram. Immediately, Venugopala

Pillai sent word to Mannargudi Narayanasvami Pillai. Understanding that good luck has dawned on the young boy, Narayanasvami Pillai happily sent Meenakshisundaram to Kottur with the person, who brought the message. The distance between Mannargudi and Kottur is twelve miles and Meenakshisundaram carrying his Taval on the head walked to Kottur. Just the very sight of the boy made the prescient Pillai to decide “here is the one who is going to rule the world in the art of Taval” and took Meenakshisundaram with him to Nagapattanam. The young boy was made to understand that he will be paid at the rate of One anna per One rupee. It was actually a real gurukulavasam for Meenakshisundaram, since Venugopala Pillai, an expert in laya exercises, used to teach the boy during his leisure hours. What all he said was repeated by the adroit Meenakshisundaram, by playing on the wooden pillars. Meenakshisundaram Pillai considered this nagasvara vidvan as his guru and showed much respect towards him, till the end of his own death. Even after the death of Venugopala Pillai, whenever Meenakshisundaram Pillai happened to visit Nagapattanam, for his concerts, he never missed to go to the house of this guru with utmost respect. Once we had been to Nagapattanam and I asked my father, where is the house of Venugopala Pillai. He took me to the house, only after removing his chappals, few yards away from that house. Even whenever my mother mentioned Nagapattanam, my father would immediately rise up. He had so much respect even to that town. An interesting incident, I would like to share here.

Once, during a procession at Neelayatakshi Amman temple, another great Taval vidvan, by name, Ambagarattur Malaipperumal Pillai was also there for another nagasvara party. He played a difficult Jati. Meenakshisundaram had no business there, since it was another troupe. But out of interest, he tried to do the same Jati, but he couldn't, because of the Kala pramana. Venugopala Pillai, got angry and shouted, “Of course, this is a difficult one, but, how is it you are unable to repeat it? If you cannot do it precisely, get lost and don't see my face anymore.”

So saying, he returned home. His wife asked him “Where is Meenakshisundaram?”, to which Pillai narrated everything. But that lady retorted, “After all he is a young boy. It is too much for you to say not to come here anymore”. After finishing his dinner, Venugopala Pillai was resting in his ‘easy-chair’. Meenakshisundaram was very shrewd and after about half an hour, he came to Venugopala Pillai's house and stood at the corner of the outer boundary. On seeing this, Pillai simply said, “Get in and have your dinner”. His wife asked, “Did Meenakshi play it?” Pillai with a smile on his face simply said, “Otherwise he would have died there itself and would not have come here.”

On the days, Venugopala Pillai had no concerts, Meenakshisundaram, with his permission, would go to different places and played for Mannargudi Chinna Pakkiri Pillai. This gave him ample opportunities to listen to the Taval playing of great vidvans like Sreevanchiyam Govinda Pillai, Vazhivoor Muthuveer Pillai, Ammachatram Kanusvami Pillai, Ammapettai Pakkiri Pillai and such others. When Venugopala Pillai was bedridden, due to some illness, Semponnarkovil Ramasvami Pillai paid a visit and during the conversation, Venugopala Pillai told him, “I am leaving Meenakshisundaram. I have trained him to such an extent that he will be ready to play with any Taval vidvan with competence. Hereafter, it is for you to take care of him.” After the demise of Venugopala Pillai in 1917, Meenakshisundaram joined the troupe of Semponnarkovil Ramasvami Pillai and served for one and a half years. Then he started to play for Nagore Subbayya Pillai, Uraiyur Gopalasvami Pillai, Madurai Ponusvami Pillai and such other stalwarts. But for about thirty years, he played for Tiruveezhimizhalai brothers, continuously and listeners used to say that Meenakshisundaram Pillai was a ‘third nagasvaram’. His Taval playing will become one with the nagasvaram. But, some misunderstanding crept in between them and so he left the party. Many came to him to patch up, but Pillai never yielded. Tiruveezhimizhalai brothers brought Kamakshisundaram Pillai from Jaffna, saying “If not Meenakshi, we have Kamakshi”. The great laya wizard, Tiru-

mullaivayil Muthuveer Pillai, once during our conversation said, “You know a disciple asked his guru, the crow is black and the cuckoo is also black and what is the difference? To which the guru replied, Wait till the arrival of Vasanta kala and then you will easily know the difference”. Meenakshisundaram Pillai was playing for many leading Nagasvara vidvans as a ‘Special Taval’, but he never agreed to play for Tiruveezhimizhalai brothers alone.

Meenakshisundaram Pillai was recognised with many awards and some among them are: ‘Tala Praveena’ (Mysore), ‘Pataha Vadya Praveena’ (Bengaluru), ‘Abhinava Nandeesar’ (Chennai from the hands of Justice ASP Iyer), ‘Taval Arasu’ (Ceylon) and many more.

India attained Independence on 15th of August, 1947. The Pontiff of Tiruvavaduturai Adheenam sent a golden wand to be presented to the new Prime Minister and also sent TN Rajarathnam Pillai and my father to play on the occasion. I was fortunate to go to Delhi with my father and be with him witnessing the entire function.

The Nagasvara and Taval world used to admire him for his ‘Nam’ and in the manner of enhancing the main artiste’s presentation of keertanas. The whole musical fraternity used to acclaim that the syllables, ‘Ta’ by Nachiyarkovil Raghava Pillai, ‘Dhee’ by Iuppur Panchapakesa Pillai, ‘Tom’ by Kumbakonam Tangavel Pillai and ‘Nam’ by Meenakshisundaram Pillai were never, sounded from any another artiste, as from these four. Another special thing was his playing ‘Nadaicchol’. In fact, playing of ‘Nadaicchol’ has completely disappeared today.

Any Taval vidvan who took part in any concert with Meenakshisundaram Pillai were simply scared to see him face to face, such a command he had. Once, during a marriage procession at the house of Sangeeta Kalanidhi, Tanjavur Ponnyaya Pillai, the Rhythmic ensemble started. Meenakshisundaram Pillai and the great laya wizard, Tirumullaivayil Muthuveer Pillai were playing. When Meenakshisundaram Pillai played a complicated Jati, Muthuveer Pillai didn’t play. My father said, “Hm, Muthuveeru, come on, play”, the other one simply raised his hands

above and said, “Maharaja! I Understand what you have just now played, but....” indirectly meaning, “my hands have no power to play that”!

Iuppur (Malaikkottai) Panchapakesa Pillai (generally addressed as ‘Panjami’) was always Meenakshisundaram Pillai’s competent partner. When once they were playing in Mannargudi, Panjami played so wonderfully that the rasikas were in the thought that Meenakshisundaram Pillai could not do it. Walking for some time, my father started to play when the tank approached and because of the water in the tank, his playing sounded marvelous. Few months after this performance, Panjami stopped playing Taval and started to give vocal concerts. Feeling that it would be a great loss to the music world, if Panjami never at all touched the instrument, Meenakshisundaram Pillai went to his house, met him and compelled him to come back again with the Taval. Panjami concurred.

Meenakshisundaram Pillai was a true Gandhian and wore only khadi dress. We were at Tiruvayaru for the Tyagaraja festival and the news came in the midst of Maharajapuram Visvanatha Iyer’s concert that Gandhiji was assassinated and we returned to Needamangalam immediately. Until the last rites were finished, my father didn’t eat anything, except water, that too at times. Then he cancelled his pre-committed engagements for a week.

Punctuality was inborn with him. He never made himself present to the concert even a minute late. He advised us also to be like him. Similarly, he never took even one rupee more than the amount already agreed from the organiser. He liked cows and there were seven cows in the cattle shed. As soon as he returned from any outstation, he would straightaway rush to the cattle shed and ask any disciple there, whether they have been fed properly.

His disciples include Pandanallur Ratnam Pillai, Koorainadu Govinda Pillai, Tirunageswaram Ratnaswami Pillai, Nachiarkoil Raghava Pillai, Emani Raghaviah, Tiruvizhandur Venugopala Pillai, Ghatam Alangudi Ramachandran, Karandai Shanmugam Pillai, and Kandiyur Muthiah Pillai.

On the compulsion of some, of course with the opposition of many relatives, he fixed the marriage of the son, Shanmukhavadivel with Renukujambal, grand daughter through Sooryanarkovil Saundaravalli. For four days, the whole town was in a celebration. The marriage was held on 12.2.1949, with the musical concerts of GNB, Alattur Brothers and some others. Pazhani Subramania Pillai accompanied Alattur Brothers on mridangam and the concert was well attended by all leading musicians of that period. By his artistry, Pazhani carried the concert to ecstasy. Thanking the musicians and honouring them, Meenakshisundaram Pillai told Palani "you have conquered us by your performance today. How can I pay back your debt? The only way to clear this debt is by my life".

After the music concert, Meenakshisundaram Pillai, as usual went to the cattle shed and patted the cows and went to bed. On the early morning of 13th, the great Needamangalam

Meenakshisundaram Pillai reached the heavenly abode. The leading Mirasdar of Needamangalam, Santana Ramasvami Udayar ran helter-skelter and shouted at the railway station master, "Remove the board, 'Needamangalam'. It has already gone far-off."

Honorary Doctorate for HH Sri Sri Jeeyar Swamiji of Yathiraja Mutt, Melukote

Tumkur University has awarded Jeeyar Swamiji with an honorary doctorate for the year 2021.

Jeeyar Swamiji has been a pillar of strength in all our endeavours and it is a proud moment for all of us at SRLKM. We pass on our hearty congratulations to Swamiji and pray to God for his well-being.

Spring Music Festival - 2023

Venue - The Bangalore Gayana Samaja

5th February 2023, Sunday, 5.30 p.m.
TM Krishna (Vocal), HK Venkataram (Violin),
KU Jayachandra Rao (Mrudanga), Giridhar
Udupa (Ghatam)

6th February 2023, Monday, 5.30 p.m.
Sanjay Subramanyan (Vocal), SVaradarajan (Vi-
olin), Neyveli B Venkatesh (Mrudanga), B Ra-
jashekar (Morsing)

7th February 2023, Tuesday, 5.30 p.m.
Kanchana Sisters - Shriranjani & Shruthi Ran-
jani (Vocal Duet), Mathur R Srinidhi (Violin),
Tumkur Ravishankar (Mrudanga), Guru
Prasanna (Khanjari)

8th February 2023, Wednesday, 5.30 p.m.
Sandeep Narayan (Vocal), B Vittal Rangan (Vio-
lin), BC Manjunath (Mrudanga), GS Ramanujan
(Ghata)

9th February 2023, Thursday, 5.30 p.m.
Ambi Subramanyam & Party (Violin Solo con-
cert)

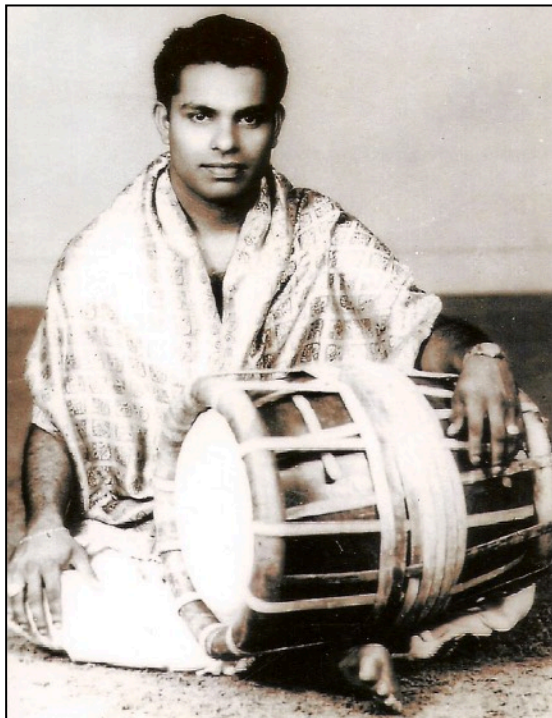
10th February 2023, Friday, 5.30 p.m.
NVijay Shiva & Party

11th February 2023, Saturday, 5.30 p.m.
Heramb & Hemanth (Flute duet), Charulatha
Ramanujam (Violin), Sai Giridhar (Mrudanga),
Chandrashekar Sharma (Ghatam)

12th February 2023, Sunday, 4.30 p.m.
Award Function followed by concert of Ab-
hishek Raghuram & Party

Yazhppanam V Dakshinamoorthi

Dr. BM Sundaram, Pondicherry



Innumerable vidvans in the field of Tavil playing have become great and famous. By the benign grace of God, the one who became an emperor in this art was Yazhppanam Dakshinamoorthi. From the district of Tanjavur, fertilised by the river Kaviri, many families, who practiced either Nagasvaram or Tavil had migrated to Srilanka. One such family was that of Visvalingam Pillai, a Tavil artiste, who went to Karai Teevu in the northern part of that country and settled down there. Visvalingam Pillai's first wife was Annammal and the couple got four children. Rudrapati, Masilamani (both were Nagasvaram artistes), Dakshinamoorthi, Bhavani, Rajarathnam, Balambikai, Sakuntalambikai, Chandro-

dayam and Karunamoorthi (Tavil artiste). The family moved from Karai Teevu to Inuvil, near Jaffna.

Dakshinamoorthi was born on 26-8-1933. His father had a grievance that he could not become prominent like many others. Hence, he decided that his son, Dakshinamoorthi should be made a very good tavil artiste to redress his worry. So, he used to bring his son, who was studying in the first standard from the school and ask him to practice, what all he taught. The school headmaster advised the father and son (who had just entered in the second standard) to devote the entire time to his practices on the Tavil. The father put Dakshinamoorthi under Inuvil Chinnatambi Pillai, who was at that time a most sought after vidvan. The son would go the guru's house at five in the morning and practice for eight hours. As soon as he returned home, the father would ask him to practice. After about two years, Dakshinamoorthi was made the student of the famous Kamakshisundaram Pillai. Practice sessions will be for eleven hours a day. The father never left the boy there. Wherever, Nagasvara concerts were held in the local or nearby temples, he used to ask the boy to sit on his shoulders and made him to watch what the great tavil vidvans played. On return to the house, he would ask his son to play, what the other vidvans played that night. Dakshinamoorthi very soon became a good Tavil artiste.

Whatever the local vidvans played or have taught, it would be good for the up-coming tavil player to learn from some great Tavil vidvan in Tamil Nadu. So, Visvalingam Pillai brought his son to Nachiyarkovil Raghava Pillai and entrust-



Nagaswaram maestro Dharmapuram Govindarajan together with The Thavils Yaazhppanam Dhakshinamurthy and Yazhppanam Chinnaraja (Photo courtesy - The Thavil Legend Thedchanamoorthy Foundation FB page)

ed the responsibility and he also happily consented. After two years, Pillai told Dakshinamoorthi on one day, “Look. What all I teach you is immediately played by you with some new imaginations. I think that there is nothing more to teach. Very soon you are going to become the monarch on Taval. Your name and fame will rise to the peak. So, you may leave now and go to your country. My hearty blessings will always be there”.

After his return to Jaffna, Dakshinamoorthi played with many legends like Kamakshisundaram Pillai, Nachiyarkovil Raghava Pillai (his own guru), Vadapadimangalam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai, Valangaiman Shanmukhasundaram Pillai and my own brother, Needamangalam Shanmukhavadivel Pillai and such others. His fame was accrescent. Many a time, he would appal the co-players with his dexterous play and arise a maelstrom in them. The programme in the Chennai Tamil Isai Sangam of Karukurichi Arunuchalam was broadcast by All India Radio, unusually, till the midnight, because of Shanmukhavadivel and Dakshinamoorthi.

Once, myself, the nagasvara vidvan, Kottur Rajarathnam and some other friends were chatting on the pial of a house in a village. The talk turned about Taval playing. Someone sitting

there mentioned the name of a Taval player and asked Rajarathnam to compare Dakshinamoorthi with the one whom he just mentioned. Immediately, a sound came through the open window and shouted, “Who is that fellow, who wants to compare the two? Nobody has been born till now even to understand what Dakshinamoorthi plays. Ask that fellow to get out”.

Marriage took place with Manonmani, daughter of Alaveddy Chelladurai Pillai and then Dakshinamoorthi built a house at Alaveddy, named it ‘Kala Bhavanam’ and moved over. Envyng his abnormal fame, some miscreants started to ignite troubles to him. Vexed with this, Dakshinamoorthi decided to leave Jaffna and settle down in Tanjavur and so he did. He took his residence in the upper portion of my house and lived there for about four years. He fixed his remuneration as not less than One Thousand Five hundred per concert.

The expertise of Taval vidvans may generally be divided into two categories. Some may be experts in laya exercises while some others may have the ability to play speeds (Pharans). In the case of Dakshinamoorthi, both were there. Further, it was difficult for anyone to compete with his incredible speed. At the same time, Dakshinamoorthi was a person to give due respects

and regards to all seniors. There are many who would ask the Nagasvara player to give room for 'Tani' in Adi tala only. Dakshinamoorthi was far from that. Generally, his rhythmic plays, with other vidvans, would be for more than two hours. Never did he ask the nagasvara vidvan, well in advance, in what tala the Pallavi will be. Once in a nagasvara performance at Pudukottai, of the 'Pallavi Giant', Tirumeigyanam Natarajasundaram Pillai, Dakshinamoorthi played 'Tani', five times with his namesake of Vadapadimangalam. If he takes to do in 'Khanda gati' or be it any, for that matter, the Mohara and Tadinginatom will also be only in that gati. I have observed him for a quite a long time, devoting time only thinking about and working on gatis and Nadais. One day, he woke me up from bed and said that he had formulated a new gati and asked me to name that. He orally demonstrated and the whole thing was having eleven syllables and I suggested the name 'Rudra Gati'. In a performance held in the temple at Haridvaramangalam, arranged by another great Taval vidvan, Pazhanivel of that place, Dakshinamoorthi played this Rudra gati, during the Tani for two hours. Many nagasvara vidvans prepared many complicated Pallavis and when they played, Dakshinamoorthi immediately grasped them and played very easily. His nimble fingers always did wonders.

He never minded how the Taval was. Once (when he was in Alaveddy) he came without his own Taval to perform in the wedding function held at Kunniyoor Sambasiva Iyer's (a great landlord) house at Mannargudi. He met a local vidvan and asked his taval. But that person said his instrument is not ready and will not be up to his expectation. "Never mind. Please bring that", so said Dakshinamoorthi. The taval was brought and it sounded very poor. After about half an hour, the Taval played by Dakshinamoorthi changed the tone and nature of it to be very perfect. Some such thing happened in Talasseri (Kerala). Dakshinamoorthi asked the temple servant to bring the one hanging on the wall and played it in such a way that even the temple taval player wondered, whether it was really the one used by him every day.

Dakshinamoorthi was generally a man of few words. He never commented about any other vidvan. He also never allowed anyone else, who chatted with him, to pass on the comments. He was always agape about Needamnagalam Shanmukhavadi and Vadapadmangalam Dakshinamoorthi Pillai and friendly. Among the youngsters, he very much liked Haridvaramangalam Palanivel.

The mridanga vadya celebrity, Palakkadu Mani Iyer was pestering me to inform him whenever Dakshinamoorthi played somewhere. A concert by Shaik Chinna Maula was in the programme schedule, arranged by R Yajnyaraman of Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai. I invited Dakshinamoorthi for this programme, since my good friend Yajnyaraman requested me. Luckily, Mani Iyer was in Chennai and so I informed him duly and he came. At the end of the programme, Mani Iyer called Yajnyaraman and asked him, "I have not studied much. Would you tell me how many are the world wonders?" "Seven", replied Yajnyaraman. "No, Eight. The eighth one is this amazing Dakshinamoorthi". Pazhani Subramania Pillai, another Mridanga vadya legend, publicly said, "He is a genius, who would make us wonder, even when we simply think of him."

When Mani Iyer was living at Tanjavur, he used to frequent my house to meet and talk with Dakshinamoorthi.

After about four years Dakshinamoorthi went to Jaffna, to play in the festival at Nallur. There he got indisposed due to some stomach problem and passed away on 15.5.1975. His bereaved wife, Manonmani, unable to bear the loss, followed her husband on 14.6.1975. Kaladevi, Udayasankar, Ravisankar, Udayaselvi and Jnyanapanditan were the issues of Dakshinamoorthi and the boy Ravisankar has blossomed as a very good Taval artiste.

Abul Fazl of Emperor Akbar's court wrote, "There was no musician equal to Tansen, in the past thousand years and there will never be one in the forthcoming thousand years". This is equally true in the case of Yazhpannam Dakshinamoorthi. His name will ever be remembered and cherished until Taval exists in this world.

Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina

Dr. Jayanthi Kumaresh

S Anand, Editor

Jayanthi Kumaresh pursued the path of her Aunt and Guru Padmavathy Ananthagopalan and is a rare Veena talent in a family rich with Violin maestros going back several generations. SRLKM thinks the 'Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina' honour has only gotten richer by associating her with the award. She is also the first Vainika to be bestowed with the honour. Despite all the achievements and the stature she has earned, she comes across as a very humble person. Receiving the honours on Saint Thyagaraja's Janma dina (birthday), she rightly said, "It is the Saraswathi Veena the national instrument of India which has been honoured today".

SRLKM is grateful to Jayanthi Kumaresh for sharing her thoughts on music.

LKT: You are conferred with the title "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina" by SRLKM. This award is coming close on the heels of Vidwans Ganesh and Kumaresh being honoured with the same award in Feb 2019. At the outset, what are your thoughts?

JK: Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira is an organisation that is very very close to my heart. I have known Krishnaprasad uncle from my childhood days when my father introduced me to him. During those days, my father was the secretary of the BTM Cultural Academy in Bangalore and



kept me informed about Krishnaprasad uncle's services to music along with his sisters. I know that he led a life fully dedicated to music, worked selflessly, and supported youngsters in those days who are now top-notch musicians. Apart from the annual festivals, concerts used to happen at the Devagiri Sabha, their in-house auditorium. I remember performing with my guru Vid. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan as a young girl at the Devagiri Sabha. Not only to me but SRLKM has been very kind to all the members of my family. My husband Kumaresh ji and my BIL Ganesh ji received this same award "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina" in the year 2019. I am glad my nephew Abhishek Raghuram is receiving the same award next year. I consider SRLKM an extension of my family and this recognition is like recognition coming from one's own family before the world recognising you. It is always special when people who have seen you from childhood recognise you. So I consider this a very special award and a special moment in my life and I thank SRLKM for bestowing this prestigious award on me.

LKT: You started playing the Saraswati Veena at the age of 3. How did you choose Veena when all your family members are associated with a great Violin lineage?

JK: I come from a family where music was the mainstay for the last six generations following the Thyagaraja shishya parampara. Most of my family members are violinists with my uncle Shri. Lalgudi Jayaraman a legendary violinist. My grandfather Sri. Gopala Iyer, mother Smt. Lalgudi Rajalakshmi, my aunt (chikkamma) Lalgudi Smt. Srimathi Brahmanandam, my cousin Lalgudi Sri. GJR Krishnan and Lalgudi Smt. Vijayalakshmi, my own sister, and Abhishek Raghuram's mother Smt. Usha Ramkumar were all violinists. Only Vainika was my Guru and aunt (doddamma) Smt. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan. My mother thought that Veena will be the apt instrument for me and started me off on this journey of Veena at the age of 3 yrs. Ever since there has not been a moment in my life where I thought 'maybe I should have learned violin'. It is always that the instrument chooses us and we don't get to choose the instrument. This journey has



Young Jayanthi Kumaresh playing Veena

been extremely beautiful, especially my tutelage with my aunt Smt. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan with whom I did gurukulavasam for twenty-two years. I left home when I was in 7th standard and stayed with her in Chennai.

LKT: Please share your experiences during early learning with Vid. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan Mami? Being from the Lalgudi stable, it must have been very rigorous.

JK: My Guru Smt. Padmavathy Amma was a guru with a difference and I went through very rigorous training. She had the vision of a business tycoon and had 360-degree plans. Apart from music, she focussed on my overall development. She made me learn French, Sanskrit, and Telugu and she even made me learn Typewriting which was a fad in those days. She made me learn dance from Alarmel Valli akka and also made me develop physically through Yoga and other physical exercises. I had to read the newspaper every day and stay up to date with the current affairs. She inculcated in me the habit of reading books that helped me develop overall.

As for as music is concerned, apart from her teaching, I was made to listen to concerts of old masters and learn finer aspects of the music. She also made me teach beginners to music. My schedule started at 4 am in the morning with 4 hours of practice. We would again practice for two hours in the evening and an hour again before retiring to bed. I can't go to bed unless I submit to her what I had learned for that day. On the day I had my concert, she made me



Jayanthi Kumaresh with Zakir ji, Toni ji, the great Charles Lloyd and Kumaresh ji

write down in a diary 'what are the things I could have done better in the concert'. She also made me play it before I could go to sleep. She was a very open-minded Guru and encouraged me to learn from TRS mama, Brinda Amma, or Balachander sir through my music scholarships. She wanted me to imbibe everything I can from different places. I am so blessed to have a guru like Smt. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan amma.

LKT: How much did Vidwan S Balachander help your musical learning? please narrate your experience performing alongside the maestro?

JK: I was introduced to an Everest of personality Shri. S Balachander through my Guru Smt. Padmavathy Ananthagopalan who considered him her manasika guru. He, in a sense, was a mystery to her. She never learned one-on-one with him but she considered him an idol. When my Guru returned back from Singapore after her long tenure at the Singapore Music College, she was very keen on having his influence on me though she never directly asked him to teach me.

In a rare gesture, Veena Balachander asked me to join him on stage and perform alongside him and my Guru. The Veena legend was very impressed and made an announcement from the stage that I will be his disciple from there on. His classes were like watching a magic show and there was no set pattern to the class. He would open a book and select a composition

and say 'Let us learn this composition together. He had a beautiful pooja room decorated with several Veena's and it was a sight to behold. He was very appreciative and had a wonderful approach and always considered my Guru Padmavathi Ananthagopalan to have provided me with an excellent upbringing. He would always say 'You are forever her student and I have only added the icing on the top to make it perfect'. Every Friday there used to be 'Raga Yagam' at the Thyagaraja Vidwath Samajam in Mylapore. He would play two Janya ragam and melakarta ragam and I used to join him along with others and explore many ragas and this continued till his last breath. I cherish my memory of playing alongside him in concert and considered I was extremely fortunate to have learned from him.

LKT: You have maintained the traditional values while collaborating with Indian and International musicians of different genres including your best half. Please enumerate your experiences and preparation for such special concerts.

JK: In every facet of our life, we are collaborating with somebody or the other be it in the family or when performing. The rules of the framework called collaboration are 'Mutual Respect', 'Conviction' about what we are doing, and 'Willingness' to learn and think of the larger good. We have to move away from our comfort zone in order to learn a new thing and as they say 'life begins outside your comfort zone. There



Jayanthi Kumaresh with Violin maestro Mysore Manjunath

is ample opportunity to learn new things when you collaborate by just observing how the other person is doing. One must have deep-rooted training, and a sense of vision for collaboration to succeed. One must represent the system he/she is from and enhance the joint creation. The entire production will not be memorable or pleasing if one has a narrow vision like 'I should excel' or 'I should only look at my part'. One should determine 'How can I fit into this whole thing and make it beautiful?' It is a 360-degree view and one should know what his/her role will be in the production.

I have collaborated with several musicians on BBC Proms, people from the west and people from the south. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with Aruna Sairam Ji, Sudha Raghunathan Ji, Bombay Jayashree ji etc. My collaboration with Violin includes Kumaresh Ji and Mysore Manjunath Ji and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi ji. I have performed with Sikkil Mala Ji on flute. Other prominent musicians that I have collaborated with include Flute Ronu Majumdar Ji, Flute Rakesh Chaurasia Ji, Sitar Purbayan Chatterjee Ji, Sitar Niladri Kumar Ji, Sitar Anupama Bhagwat Ji etc. Most importantly I have the pleasure of sharing the stage with the legendary Zakir Hussain Ji. It is always a never-ending journey to learn new things in each of these endeavours.

LKT: You have researched on styles and playing techniques of the Saraswati veena in your doctorate program. Could you share a few insights in a nutshell?

JK: Having practical knowledge is one thing and doing research and equipping yourself theoretically is yet another thing. Both my father and my Guru were very keen that I should do academic research on the subject of 'Veena Playing' that includes the origin of Veena, different kinds of Veena, When did Veena actually come into being? What are the different types of Veena that are there?, the different bhani's that exist, How Veena has evolved over a period of time?, the role of Veena in the Vedic period, current-day Veena like Electronic Veena, digital Veena etc. Studying this gave me an excellent insight into different styles of playing the Veena. Usually, people get stuck with one bhani or gharana and consider that to be the ultimate. But when you research and understand the different bhanis, you find so many beautiful elements in each bhani which you want to incorporate or incorporate unconsciously along the way. In essence, it helps open one's horizon and be insightful about Vainikas from different bhani's. My six years of research work about the Saraswathi Veena which is our national instrument gave me a good command of the subject helping me to enunciate the same subject with a lot of confidence and conviction. I must say that Dr. Mysore Manjunath has done similar research on



Violin and he was the person who guided me to take up the thesis in a similar way. I am indebted to his support of my research work.

LKT: To the numerous fans who have followed your music for a number of years, there are perhaps a few subtle changes in your musical style over the decades (each of these having its own beauty). Could you share your own thoughts on this aspect?

JK: Change is the only permanent thing in this world or in a person's life. People from my generation grew up reading books and writing. Then the typewriter made its way and then came the computer, Laptop, smartphone, and iPads emerged rapidly. Today one can do anything on the phone with an internet connection. Likewise, a musician starts the journey with the idea of music and learns from a guru what she teaches. The guru and shishyas are invariably from a different generations. Then the musician goes out into the world with what has been learned from Guru and meets several people/musicians and come under their influence that will have a bearing on their aesthetic psyche. Some of these make a strong impression on one self and become a part of his/her style. If the style has not changed for several years, I am afraid one could be stagnating in his/her music. A style is a dynamic living entity that continuously evolves adapting to the ever-changing music echo system. As a musician's maturity evolves, the style also evolves. This is what 'style' is all about. Every change may or may not be good though the change is certain and constant. Some changes are very good and one would carry for a long time but some may be fancy and will have a short life and may fizzle out soon. People who have been listening over a

period of time will notice that there is something new that has been added on and that is how it should be. It makes the music more vibrant and will make the people come back and listen to you again and again to see the surprises, evolutions, and transformations.

LKT: What were your experiences (technical, musical, and aesthetic) in playing at a (slightly) higher pitch on your Veena which you might have adopted in some of your concerts? For instance, in your video on kapi tillana in YouTube (darbar festival), you have played in the scale of F(4)

JK: Here I want to narrate a beautiful experience I had recently. It was a collaboration theme with Bombay Jayashree Ji and as it is always with lady vocalists, her sruti used to be at 5 or 5.5 (G/G#). I expressed my inability to tune Veena at that Sruti as my Veena is normally tuned to E(3). However, to my surprise, she was ready to sing at E(3). I thought that will be too low for a female vocalist but she said that 'high or low Sruti is only in the mind and it just conditions and arranges your mind to align to that pitch'. We finally agreed to perform in F(4). What she thought was a very insightful thing. Sruti (Pitch) is only an arrangement of the mind and there is nothing called as a standard Sruti. To an instrumentalist, the pitch is convenience of setting up the instrument and a tone to present music. The actual music however is the 'Soul' and it does not change. Depending on the Sruti, the tonality will be either 'shrill' or 'base' but depending on the texture of the sound that comes from a Sruti, one has to arrange their musical thoughts in such a way that it sounds best for that particular pitch.

LKT: Please enumerate your creative venture 'Cup O' Carnatic'

JK: I have been doing several types of Web Series for the last 4-5 years and 'Cup O' Carnatic' is one among them. These Web Series are made so that Karnatic music is easily accessible to people and it relates to them in today's world especially for the generation today. The first type of series called 'Cup O' Carnatic' had four seasons in which we dealt with several aspects of music like 'what is swarakshara?', 'how to plan



Indian Music Orchestra

a concert?’, ‘how to get children interested in music?’ etc. In the second season we did more about the Trinity, What is sahitya? etc. which was a little more detailed than the first. During the pandemic, we did four series of ‘Cup O’ Carnatic. In the ‘Cup O’ Carnatic-Fun Series’, we used very popular Hollywood themes and they were related to the Indian Ragas and we created a bridge. This helped the people to know the unknown from what they knew. The next series was dedicated to kids where we narrated the children's stories accompanied by playing of the Veena enabling them to unconsciously register in their minds a few ragas. They associated themselves with a certain theme and listened to the stories with music in their mind. We followed this with ‘Cup O’ Carnatic - Guess the Raga’ on Instagram where people were challenged to identify the ragas. Then came the ‘Cup O’ Carnatic - Point of View’ series where one particular raga was chosen and how one can view it from a different perspective or point of view.

These four Web Series had a tremendous reach among the younger generations with more than 3 million views on social media cumulatively. 'Jayanthi Kumaresh Academy (JKAV)' for Veena was started one year ago and over 900 people from various countries have registered and currently participating. The intent here is not to go into basic classes but to go deeper into a specified raga and we have been covering several ragas. The response has been amazing.

LKT: SRLKM was the first to host your creation ‘Indian National Orchestra’ in Bangalore. What was the idea behind this innovation?

JK: It was always my dream to have a classical music orchestra for India. Earlier All India Radio

had something similar called ‘Vadhya Vrinda’ in which Emani Sankara Sastry Ji, and Lalgudi Ji have composed but in my generation, we did not see something like this. My idea was to rope in musicians across India and brought together about twenty-five artistes together to form ‘Indian National Orchestra’. The team performed in Doordarshan, Chennai, Bombay, and in Bangalore Aishwarya Trust. When I was sharing this with Shri. Krishnaprasad, he asked me ‘what does it take to do something like this for SRLKM?’. I informed him that this would involve several artists from across the country, their scheduling, coordination of the team, sponsors etc. He said SRLKM will host this orchestra and gave a nod for hosting it in The Bangalore Gayana Samaja. Team SRLKM did a marvellous job and the show was very well received. This program is something we will all remember throughout our life. ‘Indian National Orchestra’ is still a beautiful body of great musicians, but at the moment we do not have the ability to coordinate, manage the team, and in essence put it together. While there have been requests, we are keeping everything on hold. I hope someday there will be a dedicated office set up and external organisation support to run this as a special project and the musician's role will be to only perform. ‘Indian National Orchestra’ created many original Indian compositions on Karnatic and Hindustani ragas so this is very close to my heart and should come back again.

LKT: What are your experiences and thoughts on playing with and without amplification (including pick-ups), please?

JK: Technology has made so many things possible in the field of music, particularly in the area of classical music. Vocalists used to sing at a



*Jayanthi Kumaresh with the king of hundred strings
Pt. Shivkumar Sharma ji*

higher pitch in those days compared to now. Similarly, the instrumentalist also performed at a higher pitch. This was needed because there was no technology to amplify the sound or in general the complete array of devices needed to take the music to the masses. So they did everything to make their music heard. Is amplification necessary for the Veena? Yes definitely. This is because in Veena 'gamakas' are expressed most subtly, most delicately, most sophisticatedly and they are most beautiful. The external noise created by elevators, air conditioners, and traffic makes the delivery of the clean music even more challenging. The accompanying instruments have their own subtle tonalities that need to be harmonised for the overall musical experience. Considering all these, a contact microphone and pick-up plugged into an amplifier is an important ingredient in today's concerts taking place in auditoriums. One has to be mindful of the fact that when a microphone is

used, invariably other noises also get picked up hampering the propagation of subtle nuances. An artist has to use his/her discretion in deciding on the pick-up mic depending on the tone one would like to have. The choice of the microphone has to be made by the artiste and not the sound engineer.

In a situation where it is a chamber concert, with the performance happening in a closed hall with few audiences, one can avoid amplification.

LKT: Vocal music connects people better compared to instruments going by popularity. Of late top-notch instrumentalists are switching to Vocal music. How to arrest this slide? What strides need to be taken by patrons of music to ensure instrumental music receives equal importance and appeal to the audience?

JK: Vocal music connects to people only if they know the language, region, and religion. The words in the vocal music do not mean anything to those who do not know Kannada or Telugu or Tamil or Sanskrit. In a very Karnatic set up it may appear that vocal is preferred more than instrumental music. However, in international music scenarios, it is instrumental music that has a better appeal and also has a wide reach just because one need not have to know the language or be connected to a region. Instrumentalists from India like Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, Pt. Ravishankar, Pt. Shivkumar Sharma, Vid. L. Subramanyam, Vid. Lalgudi Jayaraman, Vid. Mahalingam, S Balachander Sir, etc. have all taken the world by storm and they were all extremely popular worldwide. This precisely speaks volumes of how Indian Instrumental music is appreciated all over the world. That kind of awareness is slowly spreading specific to Karnatic music in India and it is a matter of time before people will prefer it over other music.

Pallavi Sammela - 2022



Judges TS Satyavathy, D Balakrishna, Arjun Kumar and convener HS Sudhindra



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