

# Lalitha Kala Tarangini

Premier Quarterly Music Magazine from  
Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira

Volume 2019, Issue 1

March 2019

**Special Edition  
on  
Mysore T Chowdiah**



# Kumaresh and Ganesh Honoured

The title "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina" was presented to Star Violinists  
Ganesh and Kumaresh in the divine presence of  
"H H Sri Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar"  
on 10 February 2019.

The title carries a purse of Rs. One Lakh each to Ganesh and Kumaresh, a silver  
medal and a citation. This award is instituted in memory of our founder  
Shri. G Vedantha Iyengar who started the institution 64 years ago.



Ganesh and Kumaresh with the 'Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina' award

Left to Right Standing - Sri HR Yathiraj - Vice President, Kum. Anagha Yoganand, Smt. Rajashree Yogananda,  
Sri GV Krishna Prasad - Hon. Secretary, Swamiji, Dr MR Yogananda - Treasurer

## March 2019

The years between 1940 and 60 will go down in the history of Karnatic music as the golden period when doyens like Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Palghat Mani Iyer, Pazhani Subramania Pillai, etc. brought glory. While most of the musicians were from Tamil Nadu, one Ratna of Karnataka (then Mysore) 'Sangeetharatna Mysore T Chowdiah' (1895 - 19 January 1967) admirably represented us and was a crowning glory of Karnataka. While there was a strong "outsider" tag that people of Tamil Nadu used to impose on others, musicians like Mysore T Chowdiah, Mysore Vasudevachar were considered insiders and rewarded. Thus, Chowdiah was a pioneer, an ambassador of music who sowed the seeds for the current day musicians to be accepted and recognised. Karnataka's musicians who followed Chowdiah were truly benefited.

Madurai Mani Iyer has said, "Chowdaiah made a great name for himself, but he always wished to perfect his art and to achieve this, he practised even to the last day of his life". The great Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer has said that "Chowdaiah will receive claps just with his short finishing strokes". Violin great Lalgudi Jayaraman's father Shri. Gopala Iyer has said that he had incorporated aspects from Chowdiah and Rajamanickam Pillai playing. Paying rich tribute to Chowdiah, GT Narayana Rao noted musicologist and critic says, "Chowdiah's accompaniment meant 'Krishnasarathya' to the main artiste and the caliber is the greatest that I have ever known. He was a gentleman who loved art, lived for art and died in the service of art".

The fact is that he was awarded the Sangita Kalanidhi ahead of GN Balasubramaniam, Madurai Mani Iyer, Papa Venkataramaiah, Alathor Brothers speaks volumes of his recognition. We are dedicating this edition of Lalitha Kala Tarangini to Mysore T Chowdiah.

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 Karnatak Classical Music. SRLKM is a Trustee of Karnataka Fine Arts Council (Regd.) which is a consortium of 10 sabhas in Bangalore.

"Lalitha Kala Tarangini" publication is fostered by Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, disseminates knowledge in the area of Karnatak 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.

This edition includes twin article on S Rajam (10 February 1919 - 29 January 2010) whose centenary year is being celebrated this year. One article is on his music and another is on his painting skills. Lalitha Ram, author of many books that includes GN Balasubramnian, Pazhani Subramania Pillai, S Rajam makes it very interesting and compelling to read.

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (SRLKM) successfully organised their Sankranti and Spring Music Festivals this January and February. 'Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina' was conferred on twin violinists Ganesh and Kumaresh. They also gave away the 'Lalitha Kala Suma' award that carries Rs.10,000 to 62 music organisations across the state on 03 March 2019. Indeed, what SRLKM doing is very rare, as their recognition covers 360° that includes Senior Musicians, Young Musicians, Veteran Musicians, and Music organisation. Chinnamanur A Vijayakarthekeyan & Idumbavanam V Prakash Ilayaraja gave a scintillating Nagaswaram concert before the 'Lalitha Kala Suma' honours were presented.

### Anand S

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### Magazine Committee

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Mysore T Chowdiah accompanying MS Subbulakshmi with Kalpathi Ramanathan on Mridangam (Late 1930 or early 40)

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## Lalitha Kala Tarangini - Inbox

Dear Editor,

Kudos to you for the second instalment about flute Maali in your Dec 2018 apart from the one I presented in one of the previous issues.

In 1977, I arranged his flute recital at Shimoga during Ganapathy festival. Due to radiator trouble of the car, we reached the venue around 9pm and Maali was too tired after starting around 2 pm. We hurried him to the stage after a wash-up and traditional concert attire. He put forth a condition that he will play only for a short period and that the organisers should not object. Accordingly the concert started. Maali handed over his wrist watch to Khanjira player Ramachar who went on turning the time needle backwards every one hour. Now and then Maali was looking at the time. Thus, the concert ended around 2

am after starting at 10pm. Thanjavur Upendran was the mridangam player.

The next day, when I informed this to Maali he had a hearty laugh and mentioned that after seeing none amongst the large audience in a mood to leave the auditorium during the concert, he lost himself in melody with violinist M Chandrasekaran enthusing him with his brilliant response. His exploration of Simhendramadhya raga and the composition "Natajana Paripalaya" is still reverberating in my memory.

Regards,  
CP Chikkanna

Dear Shri. GV Krishnaprasad,

I have received the Lalitha Kala Tarangini music magazine sent by you. It is a value based edition and looks very appealing.

I would like to express my opinion about Veena Venkatagiriappa's article in your magazine. Veena Venkatagiriappa had a very strong legacy and heritage which had a big influence on him to become a vainika. His grandfather Dodda Subbarayaru used to play the Veena keeping it standing in the urdha mukha position. He was also the asthana vidwan and was very close to His Highness Chamaraja Wadiyar. Now, it has become the norm to keep the Veena in horizontal position while playing.

I will be very happy if you could add the above sentences in your next edition. I congratulate you for having started such a value based magazine.

Thanking you,  
V Amritha (Daughter of Veena Venkatagiriappa)

Dear Smt. V Amritha,

Thanks for providing your valuable comments. We consider LKT will be richer by including such age old traditions. We will definitely consider carrying a short story on this in the subsequent edition.

Editor



## Noted Mridangam Vidwan Madras A Kannan passes away at 99

Very senior Mridangam exponent Madras A Kannan passed away at Mylapore on Monday 01 April 2019. He was 99.

While most of the musicians of his generation hailed from the Kaveri belt, Kannan was born in Royapetah. Although not hailing from a traditional musical family, his father gave up his business and supported his (A Kannan's) growth moment he started playing in concerts.

Kannan's initiation into music happened thanks to the recommendation of his headmaster of the Primary School. On an auspicious day, he started learning Vocal and Veena from Krishnasami Naidu and Mridangam from Pitambara Desai. Dakshinamurthi Pillai promised to take care of Kannan's future and within a few months arranged for Kannan's learning under Thanjavur Ramadasa Rao.

He was a great admirer of Palghat Mani Iyer and Pazhani Subramania Pillai both of whom he had seen visiting his guru Thanjavur Ramadasa Rao.

When he completed 75 years in the music field. Sruti Foundation honoured him with the Vellore Gopalachariar award. Several other felicitations followed. Nalli organised a grand function at the New Woodlands hotel. Karnataka Government honoured him for this achievement and awarded him with the title 'Pancha Nada Kalaratna'.



### Our Upcoming Programmes

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>05 May 2019</b><br>Saturday<br>5.30 pm  | <b>The Bangalore Gayana Samaja</b><br><b>RAGA LAYA PRABHA</b> award function<br>- The award is to commemorate the memory of the Founder Directors Vidushi GV Ranganayakamma and Vidushi GV Neela and Chief Patron of SRLKM Dr. GV Vijayalakshmi with a purse of Rs. 25,000/- and a citation to Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath (Vocal), Bhargavi Venkatram (Vocal), B Vittal Rangan (Violin) and YG Srilatha (Veena).<br>The award will be presented by Sangitha Kala Acharya Vid. Neela Ramgopal followed by special concert of :<br>Neela Ramgopal (Vocal)<br>B Vittal Rangan (Violin)<br>KU Jayachandra Rao (Mridangam)<br>UN Giridhar Udupa (Ghatam) |
| <b>09 June 2019</b><br>Sunday<br>5.30 pm   | <b>SRLKM Auditorium</b><br>DB Ashwin (Vocal)<br>(Grandson of doyen TK Rangachari)<br>Nishanth Chandran (Violin)<br>Akshay Anand (Mridangam)<br>Krishnaprasad NS (Ghatam)   |
| <b>07 July 2019</b><br>Sunday<br>5.30 pm   | <b>SRLKM Auditorium</b><br>G Mohan Rangan and G. Ravikiran (Flute duet)<br>Charulatha Ramanujam (Violin)<br>HS Sudhindra (Mridangam)<br>Ranganatha Chakravarthi (Ghatam)   |
| <b>11 Aug 2019</b><br>Sunday<br>5.30 pm    | <b>SRLKM Auditorium</b><br>NR Prashanth (Vocal)<br>Nalina Mohan (Violin)<br>GS Ramanujam (Mridanga)<br>Phanindra Bhaskara - (Ghatam)   |
| <b>05 - 08 Sep 2019</b><br>Thursday-Sunday | Veena concert festival at Bangalore Gayana Samaja Auditorium   |

# S Rajam - The Painter

*Lalitha Ram, Bangalore*

The first half of the twentieth century saw the ascent of Tamil Print magazines. Several artists enriched these publications through their illustrations. Of which, five artists viz. K Madhavan, Gopulu, Silpi, Maniam and S Rajam left an everlasting impact. Each of the above-mentioned artists are unique in their own way. One can broadly say, Shri. S Rajam was unique in two counts.

1. He was not only a professional artist (Given the quality and the volume of his art works, he can only be classified as a professional artist) but also a professional musician with a full-time job at the All India Radio – Madras.
2. The style that he chose to portray his themes, inspired by the traditional Indian

fresco paintings and the oriental water wash technique.

## Early Years

S Rajam was born on 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 1919. His father V Sundaram Iyer was a lawyer and a connoisseur of music. S Rajam in an interview has mentioned that music and painting were like his two eyes. If it was his father's interest that spurred Rajam to take up music, it was the way his mother Chellammal went about executing even the smallest chores with an aesthetic and artistic touch that drew him towards art.

Rajam went to PS High school where he met Lingiah (Uncle of artist Maniam). Lingiah's interest in painting further enthused S Rajam's interest. Lingiah and Rajam would share the expenses for the art materials and spend their leisure hours in painting. To quote S Rajam, "I never



thought of joining the college of arts. I always wanted to be a professional musician. It was Lingiah who wanted to join the college of arts. Unfortunately, he died young due to illness. In a way, it was his wish that prompted me to join the Arts college."

By the time S Rajam had joined the college of arts, he had also acted in the lead role of a then blockbuster movie – "Seetha Kalyanam" (He had acted in three other movies as well). His tryst with the tinsel world had invited skepticism from the then principal of Government College of arts and renowned artist/sculptor DP Roy Chowdhry. But it didn't take long for S Rajam to prove his mettle. He topped the course every single year and won the prestigious Dr. Rangachari scholarship. He even got a double promotion that helped him finish the six-year course in five years.

During his college years, S Rajam met Lewis Thompson – a poet and a follower of Ramana

Maharishi. The acquaintance turned out to be life changing as Lewis Thompson introduced S Rajam to the philosophy and concept of classical Indian art. Thompson's words, "Art must represent nature; but not reproduce it", became S Rajam's Tharaka Mantra. While the college course, inspired by the western view, focused on techniques for realistic portrayal, the Indian perspective was more symbolic and suggestive. An inspired Rajam would visit various temples and study the sculptures deeply to understand the portrayal and the philosophy behind it. The idea that the features of the Godly subjects in the sculptures were to depict "what is ideal" rather than "what is real" fascinated S Rajam endlessly. Even before his graduation from the college of arts, it was clear to him that his works would be based on the classical Indian style.

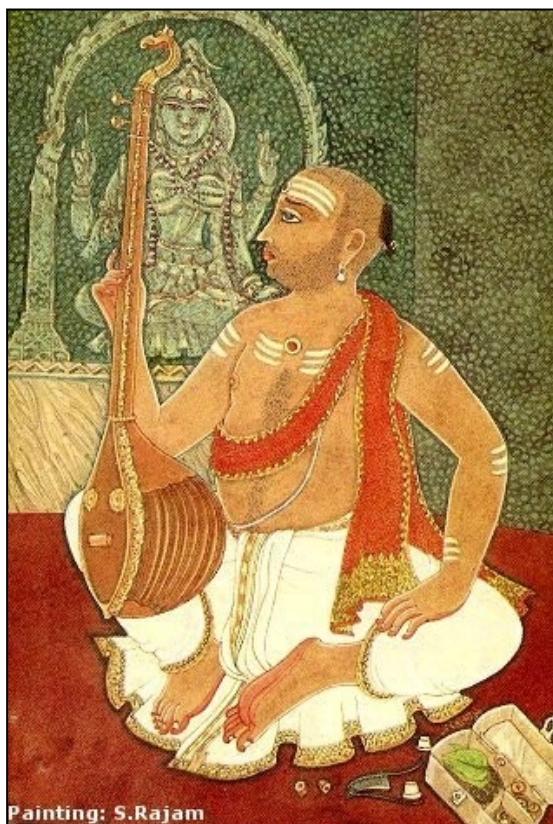
In 1939, Rajam met KV Jagannathan – the editor of "Kalaimagal". Rajam's first published work depicting a Guru and his disciple appeared in Kalaimagal the same year. It was the first of the many that would follow.

By the time he graduated, his career as a musician had taken off reasonably well. After a short stint as the in-charge of music and dance for the celebrated dancer Ramgopal, Rajam joined All India Radio Madras. During his vacation and during the concert tours, Rajam visited places such as Thanjavur, Kanchipuram, Sittannaval, Sigiriya and studied the paintings deeply. In 1945, he visited the Ajanta caves. The paintings in there proved to be a lifelong inspiration for Rajam.

His illustrations on the themes based on literature, mythology and philosophy became a regular feature in Kalaimagal and other published works of KV Jagannathan. It was a matter of time that his works were sought by other publications such as Dinamani, Kalki etc. The special issues like Deepavali Malar gave him ample space to explore his subjects in depth.

### Painting Technique

Rajam developed a style of his own drawing inspiration from the Indian frescos and combining it with the Chinese water wash technique.





The distinct lines (rekhas) and his depiction of features such as eyes, fingers were clearly inspired by the Classical Indian frescos and the water colour technique was based on the Chinese style. Although most of his works were on hand made paper, he has also done several works on surfaces such as wood, silk etc. The staggering feature of his paintings is the literal and figurative layers buried in them. The depth that he managed to create is the fruit of his arduous technique.

His themes often required meticulous research. After research, he created the entire painting with the all details in his mind. He started off the paintings with a pencil outline depicting the central figure. The actual painting is done around this central figure thereby creating the required depth. He used layers of transparent colours. Each colour is applied only to be washed away with water using a brush. Upon drying the next layer is applied and washed away. It is this series of washes and the combination of the colours that eventually gave the desired colour scheming that was originally envisioned. After the application of the transparent colours, the opaque colours are applied over it. Finally, his characteristic ink outlines (rekhas) were done using a Fineliner pen.

Clearly, this technique requires immense patience and (depending on the size) each painting can take from a few weeks to a few months for completion. It was Rajam's disciplined approach and incredible ability to multitask that allowed him to simultaneously work on several paintings. It was his capacity to quickly mentally switch from one theme to the other, as the paintings were drying, was the main reason for the volume of work he could produce.

### His Works

It was in the early 1940's the Music Academy, Madras approached Rajam to paint the Carnatic music trinity. Rajam referred previous portrayals, studied written accounts and created the portraits. They were not just faces but had multiple layers in them hinting at their life events and their compositions. It will not be an overstatement to say that these portraits have

reached an immortal status on par with the compositions of the trinity. His original paintings of the trinity on various surfaces and in a wide range of sizes can be seen in over hundred locations.

Apart from the Trinity, he had done hundreds of paintings based on Indian classical music. He has painted portraits of several notable composers such as Gopalakrishna Bharathi, Annamacharya, Purandaradasa, Othukadu Venkata Kavi etc. His portrayal of the seven swaras based on Muthiah Bhagavata's book 'Sangeetha Kalpadrumam' is another masterpiece. He has meticulously depicted the features associated with each of the swara including the colour, ornament, life span, flower, Vahana, Rishi, Devata, Nakshatra, Rasa, Weapon, food etc.

If one studies his works chronologically, it can be inferred that he keeps modifying his works as he gets more and more details. This can be easily observed in his trinity as well as the Saptaswara paintings.





He has also illustrated hundreds of songs of many composers. As a musician, he had a penchant for unearthing rare compositions. That had also driven him to portray some of the rare compositions of famous composers (e.g. “*Vidhi Chakradhulu* and *Dayaseyavayya* of Tyagaraja). His other famous music-based works include the ‘Navagrahas’, ‘Panchalinga Kritis’ and the various forms of Ganapathi – all inspired from the kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar. He also came up with a unique musical letter pad that had line draw-

ings of about hundred classical compositions with a short description.

Apart from music, literature and mythology proved to be great inspirations for his paintings. Thematic series including Dashavatara, Ashta Dikpalakas, Ashta Lakshmi, Sapthamatrika etc. are some of his critically acclaimed works based on mythology.

His art work has adorned several books. One fabulous example is the Scenes from the Ramayana illustrated in the Valmiki Ramayana Publication. Some of his works have also been compiled as books. Notable ones are the Chitra Periya Purana - depicting the legends of the 63 Nayanmars and the Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam - depicting the 64 divine plays of Shiva. Another book titled “Dancing with Shiva” published by the Himalayan Academy, USA has over hundred works of Rajam reproduced with exemplary production value.

Although not in large numbers, Rajam has handled several contemporary themes as well. Even in handling such themes (e.g. a typical day in a South Indian Women’s life), his approach is true to his style.

Despite achieving singular heights in multiple fields, Rajam was humility personified. He lived a simple and contented life. Greatness sat lightly on him. Money or fame were never his priorities. While he never sought for accolades, plenty of unique honours reached him. One example would be the preservation of his paintings in the time capsule built by the Kauai Hindu Monastery in Hawaii.

Rajam passed away in 2010 at the ripe age of 90. He was seen painting even a week before his passing away.

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## Vidwan B Vishwanath passes away

Veteran violinist and a senior All India Radio (AIR), Bangalore artiste Vidwan B Vishwanath passed away. He was 99 yrs old. He had served AIR for several decades. Team SRLKM recognises his contribution to music and we pass on our condolences to the bereaved family.

# RKP the Jambavan

*Editor, Anand S, Bangalore*

As I enter Vidwan RK Padmanabha's (RKP) house in JP Nagar (Sharada Kala Kendra), I felt I was engulfed in the middle of his many many achievements and part of his universe. It was pure bliss. The temple of music is well decorated with many walls of fame decorated with his accomplishments in the forms of well presented pictures of his Titles, Press reviews, Mementos etc.

It was my turn to congratulate and compliment RKP on two of his recent recognitions. Srividya International University of Vedic Sciences, Sanford, Florida, USA, bestowed him with an honorary Doctorate on 04 February. It was a fitting tribute considering his father Shri. Krishna Dikshitar was a Vedic scholar and a yogi. It was as though his lineage was recognised. RKP also was honoured the 'A' Grade from Prasara Bharati, All India Radio, Bangalore without he having to give an audition, some thing that is very rare. RKP never went after awards and recognition but I guess these awards enriched themselves by getting associated with RKP.

RKP was born and brought up in Rudrapatnam a small hamlet on the banks of river Cauvery in Arkalgud taluk of Hassan district in a Purohitis parampara on 26 September 1949. The village was a confluence of *Veda Brahma* and *Nada Brahma* and is associated with a very rich musical legacy much like Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. It has to its credit musicians like RK Srikantan, RK Thyagarajan and RK Taranathan (Rudrapatnam brothers), RK Srinivasamurthy, RK Suryanarayana, RK Ramanathan, RK Prakash, RS Ramakantha and many more. The people of the village migrated from Sengottai in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu and they are known as *Sanketis* who practised Veda and music. RKP says, "One great Sadvimani by name Nacharam brought the people from Sengottai to Rudrapatnam".

RKP fondly recollects the glory of 'Tottimane' in Rudrapatnam, which is a collection of seven houses within one block with an opening in the middle (more like a verandah) which is a common place. Noted musicians and vaggeyakaras

*RK Padmanabha receiving the honorary doctorate from Srividya International University of Vedic Sciences, Sanford, Florida, USA. Also seen in the picture is Justice N Santosh Hegde.*







RK Padmanabha in a programme with his students at Varanasi

by name Venkataramanaiah, Totti Tammaiah, Venkataramappa lived there and used to do sadaka regularly all of which was a way of life for them. Festivals like Ramanavami were organised there which was attended by people like Veena Sheshanna.

RKP was not inclined to music till later in his life. He was a sportsman having represented his University in Ball Badminton and many more games. During his profession at State Bank of India, he was inspired by the music of Semman-gudi Srinivasa Iyer rendering Bhairavi swarajatti. It was as though an internal awakening and he found something he was missing in his music. He joined Vijaya College of Music in January 1974 and trained under HV Krishnamurthy. He gave his first concert in September 1975.

#### **Ardent devotee of Sadguru Vadiraja**

The turning point in his life came in 1991 when he came under the influence of 'Sadguru Vadiraja Theertha' a *Dvaita* philosopher under *madhva* siddantha after being inspired by his compositions. Over a period of 3-4 years, he tuned over hundred composition of Vadiraja and also recorded them as an audio. The Audio, the compositions with notations were distributed free to people. The message in the composition was so powerful that he became an ardent devotee and considers him his Guru. Today 'Vadiraja Kala Bhavana' he built in Bangalore (Hulimavu) stands as an epitome of his *bhakti* towards Vadiraja. The Bhavana is constructed at a cost of ₹1.25 Cr. In 1999, RKP undertook a tour to US and gave concerts that fetched ₹15 Lakhs.

#### **Nurturing music among masses**

It was in 1994 when I hit upon another breakthrough in bringing the music to the masses through 'Goshti Gayana'. I brought large number of people mostly ladies and youngsters and taught them music so that they can sing in chorus and named it 'Goshti Gayana' says RKP. It is the ladies who understand the true value of this music and have the best chance of propagating it to the next generation he adds. Over period he has trained over thousand people and his students form an excellent representation of students and connoisseurs both. They have learned Navavarna kritis, Navagruha kritis, Chaturragamalika, Shyama Sastri swarajattis, Thyagaraja's pancharatna kritis covering over 900 kritis. One can observe unison, co-ordination, perfect harmony, perfect grip over the raga and laya in their 'Goshti Gayana'. The 'Goshti Gayana' group can boast of 900 odd kritis and some of his disciples are forerunners in the music circuit.

RKP proudly says, 'I have instilled a sense of understanding, an interest towards music and also guide them to develop soft-skills required for life. I attend concerts of my disciples. I don't keep anything away from them. My students love me and some of them have been with me all their life.

'Gana Yatra' (Musical excursion) is another initiative intended towards his students to feel the tradition and places where the great composers lived. RKP has organised 'Gana Yatra' where he accompanied his students to places like Thiruvaiyur, Thiruvavur, Varanasi, Pancha Dwarka etc.



*During a music festival at 'Saptaswara Dhyana Mandira', Rudrapatnam*

### **RKP, an organiser par excellence**

RKP is gifted with conceiving and managing musical events whose sole aim is to uplift and highlight the greatness of music and showcase best of the music. Young budding artistes aspiring to make a name for themselves get the much needed opportunity.

#### **1) Sharada Kala Kendra**

It was established in the year 1990 by RKP in the loving memory of his mother. Many students have prospered under the roof of 'Sharada Kala Kendra' learning the true essence of music. RKP teaches with passion but it is rigorous and tough. However, it comes free to students. Over 1000 students have been produced with some of them leading performers.

#### **2) Saptaswara Dhyana Mandira**

With a view to give back his best to place of his origin, 'Saptaswara Dhyana Mandira' was conceived in the year 2008. It is an architectural marvel that looks like a tambura. The foundation is a heptagon that connects to 7 notes in music. The entrance also has seven steps. The stem of the Tambura has 72 flowers connecting to the 72 melakarta ragas. Electronic sensors ensures the Shruti is played as soon as one enters the Mandira.

The Mandira is dedicated to Purandaradasa, Vadiraja, Kanakadasa, Tyagaraja, Mutthuswamy Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri with Goddess Saraswathi in the central place. A pre recorded music is played the moment one touches the feet of the deity. The aarathi is by tanam and naivedyam is by a pallavi. The Mandira reflects appropriately the bygone culture of Rudrapat-

nam. Annual music festival 'Sangeetha Sammelanam' and 'Gana Sharadham' is conducted on Bahula Pachami day in memory of Sadguru Thyagaraja at the Rama Mandira in Rudrapatnam.

RKP toiled day and night and mobilised ₹1.75 Cr. towards the construction of this monument.

At present efforts are underway to build a 'Dwadasha Swara Sthamba Mantapa'. RKP says music requires 12 notes (frequencies) to represent fully. So 13 pillars are being conceived (12 semitones of an octave plus the upper sa) in Rudrapatnam very similar to 7 pillars of Hampi.

#### **3) Vadiraja Kala Bhavana**

This excellent project was completed in 1999 as a tribute to his Guru Shri. Vadiraja Theertha. It is located in southern part of Bangalore called Hulimavu. It has Dhyana Mandira, an auditorium, a hall and a Kuteera. The idol of Sadguru Vadiraja Theertha is consecrated by His Holiness late Sri Vishwottama Theertha, the then pontiff of Sonda Mutt. There is another hall that has pictures of all great musicians cut across Karnataka and Hindustani landscape. Bhavana hosts several music festivals like Sri Purandara and Sri Tyagaraja aradhana mahotsava, Sri Vadiraja aradhana mahotsava, Sri Vasudevacharya aradhana mahotsava, Dikshitar's day etc.

#### **4) Karnataka Ganakala Parishat**

RKP says, "Karnataka Ganakala Parishat is a 49 year old organisation working for the cause of music specially harnessing the local talent. It was founded by music veterans in the year 1969. The first conference took place in 1970 and the first





*Karnataka Ganakala Parishat president (Ganakala Bhushana) being taken on a procession*

ever president was Jagadoddarana fame 'BS Raja Iyengar'. The conference used to take place at 'Sri Nijaguna Kshetra'. For the first time in Karnataka, the institute gave importance to 'Sangeetha Shastra' in addition to regular music concerts. Many lecture demonstrations were organised towards this. In those days Hindustani Vidwans came down from Mumbai to give demonstration on Voice culture. Balappa Hukkeri and Dr. Banandur Kempaiah (Instrumentalist), Janapada artistes have given demonstrations. People like MSS, MLV, Mani Iyer, MS Gopalakrishnan have all performed in the by-gone years. The conference used to glitter with top artists of the country".

RKP was invited to participate as an expert committee chairman in 2001 that was held in Udupi. In 2004, the Executive Committee nominated him as President and the first conference under his leadership was held at Ramanathapura (near Rudrapatnam).

Over the years RKP has given an impetus to the organisation and ensured the conference always is held outside Bangalore in places like Nanjanagudu, Hole Narasipura, Gadag, Bijapura etc. The idea was to take music outside Bangalore and spread the essence of music to rural masses. Over the years involvement of people have largely increased and the yearly budget to the extent of ₹15-20 Lakhs is being raised. RKP says "The organisation is planning a mega 50th year conference (Golden Jubilee celebration) in February 2020 extending to 16 days and to a budget outlay of ₹ 2 Cr. This will provide more op-

portunity to local youngsters. Currently we have 49 Ganakala Bhushana's (award given to senior music scholars) and 23 Ganakala Sri's (award given to young music scholars)".

These festivals are conducted with lot of fanfare and with the conference president taken on a procession in a Chariot. This is also a time when the organisation brings out music related publications on rare subjects. 'Gana Yagna' will be conducted in the morning hours which is a first of its kind comprising of musical rituals offered through the swaras, ragas, krithis and by talas with the aid of Vedic hymns.

RKP pays his gratitude to musicians A Subbarao, Bangalore Venkatram, HV Krishnamurthy, Anoor Ramakrishna, Honnappa Bhagavathar, ER Sethuram, past presidents of the Karnataka Ganakala Parishat who brought glory to the organisation.

### **Musician with a difference**

RKP is a unique musician who has created his own style with emphasis on divinity, shruti and melody. His music is inspired by doyens like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, MD Ramanathan etc. and he maintains the tradition specially in the Kriti presentation. His unique contribution to music is in the area of "Tanam" rendering. Inspired by Titte Krishna Iyengar, he has conceptualised 16 types of Tanams and has to his credit incorporating two novel Tanams namely 'Bhringa Tana' and 'Rudra Tana' into the world of Karnatik Music. He has composed over 400 compositions some of which incorporates intricate technical aspects.

RKP stands very tall in the music world but to him all the achievements are past glory and he is focussed on what more can be done. He has thousands of students, devised unique ways to present music, been an organiser of the highest order, and a great project manager. He is somebody who has brought Rudrapatnam back on the music map and today he is the only connection we have to the Rudrapatnam's old tradition and culture. With his contributions standing tall like Mt. Everest, he is an everlasting gem of Karnataka.



# Mysore T Chowdiah, the pride of Karnataka

CP Chikkanna, Bangalore



The contribution of Mysore T Chowdiah to Carnatic music is invaluable. He elevated the status of violin and his native place Mysore by his artistry of playing violin throughout the world. He lives forever in the history of Carnatic music. He was a born artist, an innovator, a composer of merit, highly courageous and an experimentalist as the architect of 7 strings violin. He stood by his innovation and resisted the criticism that the 7 strings violin doesn't suit Carnatic music because it produces apaswaras by the elite of music in those days. CS Krishna Iyer, brother of noted scientist Sir CV Raman was the leading critic. He was the disciple of Tiruvaiyaru Sabesha Iyer. Chowdiah proved that the technique of playing the 7

strings violin itself is an art and those who failed to acquire the skills of playing, criticised out of frustration! Thesis could be written about him and his art. He is known for his deep devotion and dedication to music, generosity in freely teaching and helping his disciples to lead a comfortable life.

He was born in a tiny village near T Narasipura in Mysore district and had his initial lessons from his mother who herself was a musician. He later joined the great Bidaram Krishnappa and acquired name and fame. As Chowdiah's voice was not up to the expectation of Bidaram, he was trained in violin by the maestro first on the 4 strings instrument. Chowdiah had the honour of accompanying his master in his numerous vocal recitals all over south India. The bond between them was so intense that it was like father and son. During a concert in Madras in the early 1920, Chowdiah accompanied Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar with his guru amongst the audience. That concert changed the destiny of Chowdiah. Thereafter he accompanied maestros like Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Musiri Subramaniya Iyer, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, GNB, etc. His popularity and his new 7 strings violin was so intense that maestros like Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Alathur brothers, GNB, Madurai Mani Iyer etc. were eagerly after Chowdiah and waiting in the queue with folded hands to accompany them. This eclipsed the concert opportunities of leading contemporary Violinists Kumbakonam Rajamanickam Pillai, Parur Sundaram Iyer, Papa Venkataramiah, Thiruvallangadu Sundaresa Iyer popularly known as Suswara Sundaresha Iyer, Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu etc.

The friendship between Chembai and Chowdiah was so deep that they were like one soul and two bodies. They came together in the mid 1920's and their friendship lasted till the death of Chowdiah in 1967. The credit of identifying the talent and potential of MS Subbulakshmi should go to Chowdiah. During his concert tour of Madurai and surrounding areas, he was introduced to MS's Mother Veena Shanmugavadivu and her daughter. On his invitation, the mother and daughter gave several performances together on the Veena and vocal in Mysore, Bangalore and other places. In the later days, Chowdiah had accompanied her in several concerts including the one at Shivananda theatre (present Movieland Theatre), in Gandhinagar, Bangalore according to noted Ghatam maestro late KS Manjunath who played Ghatam in that concert.

The innovation of 7 strings violin is very interesting. Before its innovation, Thousands of listeners were always in attendance to hear Chembai's recitals with Chowdiah on the violin and there were no microphones to amplify violin and it was not audible to the listeners especially in the far-end and middle rows. After deep thought, Chowdiah came up with his new invention. He was so afraid of demonstrating this and obtaining the approval of guru Bidaram Krish-

nappa, he showed it and played before Veena Seshanna with a request to convince his master to permit him to play in his vocal concert.

On Seshanna's suggestion, Chowdiah carried the 7 strings violin to a concert of Krishnappa. After playing for some time, on Seshanna's signal, Chowdiah opened the box and began to tune the 7 strings violin. This was sufficient for Krishnappa to lose his cool and he began to admonish the disciple openly in the Sadas. Seshanna asked Krishnappa to let Chowdiah demonstrate his new instrument as there is no harm in that. After Seshanna's intervention, the concert went on well and Krishnappa too was highly pleased by this invention that he always started performing with the the 7 strings violin accompaniment by Chowdiah.

The innovation of seven strings Violin and the domination of Chowdiah on it reached outside the country and caught the attention of Germans. An emissary from Germany came to Mysore with a request to see the instrument and the techniques employed by Chowdiah to play on this new instrument. Chowdiah not only showed the instrument but also taught the visitor the fingering and bowing techniques and gifted him a 7 strings violin as a token of good will and friendship.

*Mysore T Chowdiah accompanying Mysore V Doraiswamy Iyengar. ML Veerabhadrarajaiah on Mridangam and Bangalore KS Manjunath on Ghatam*





1959 - Sri Chowdiah preserves Sri. K Puttu Rao's memory at the Bidaram Krishnappa Rama Mandira, along with Sri K. Srikantiah - Photo courtesy Shri. K Srikantiah (A home called "Parvathi")

Chowdiah's friends circle was very large. Big landlords, zamindars, businessmen, High Court and Supreme Court judges and many politicians were prominent amongst them. He commanded royal treatment wherever he went which is beyond the imagination of a common man. A textile merchant, Trichur Rama Iyer gifted Chowdiah costly Silk Zeri Veshty, angavastra, and silk shirt apart from other daily use apparels. The then judge of Madras High Court Justice Rajaratnam and Sangitha Kalanidhi justice TL Venkatarama Iyer (He was an authority in Law, Music and Sanskrit) who was a Supreme Court judge hosted Chowdiah in their palatial mansions with all comfort with an attendant and a chauffeur for his movements in Madras.

The entire music world held Chowdiah in high esteem and respect. During a Thyagaraja Aradhana at Thiruvaiyaru, when the mass rendering of Pancharathnas was about to begin after the song "*Cetulara Srungaramu*" played on the flute by Palladam Sanjeeva Rao, H Ramachandra Shastri and other players, Chowdiah's car landed inside the pandal. The audience started murmuring "Chowdiah vanduttar" and welcomed him with claps. As he drove straight to the pan-

dal without a bath, the pancharathna rendering was delayed to have him take a dip in Cauvery and join the elite in the Sangita seva! no other musician in the history of Karnatac music commanded that much of popularity as Chowdiah.

Chowdiah had several weakness. He was very innocent and took trivial issues seriously without verifying and used to loose his temper and respond very aggressively to the ill propaganda and allegations about him by his detractors and openly invited several problems and defamation cases. It was Advocate K Puttu Rao, father of KK Murthy (builder of Chowdiah memorial hall, Bangalore) a close friend always used his skill and intelligence and saved Chowdiah from embarrassment.

Legendary Mridangam maestro Palghat Mani Iyer in his autobiography "*Sila neenaivugal Sila kuraippugal*" has mentioned about few accompanists who were born vishaya ghnanis. These vishaya ghnanis without the knowledge or mathematical skills, precisely respond and reproduce in their turn the tough Pallavis, anuloma viloma and different nadais of the main performers in concerts. After the concert, if any vidwan or a student ask them the details and for a demonstration, they can't. It is Divine grace and blessings says Mani Iyer.

Chowdiah is one such gifted person. The bond between him and Mani Iyer was so high that they held each other in high esteem. On many occasions, Mani Iyer solidly stood with Chowdiah and helped him to come out of difficult and embarrassing situation in a number of concerts. The two together would create confusion in the mind of the main artist by their unique play and lead him to safety in the final stages. Only those who were blessed with deep knowledge and experience in laya matters could only understand this.

In those days and even today, it is considered below their dignity for accompanists to ask the main artist about the Pallavi and the tala to have a rehearsal or an understanding. Chowdiah too had such embarrassing moments many times in his life. Powerful vocal duo Alathur brothers





*Mysore T Chowdiah accompanying MS Subbulakshmi with MS Sakthivel (Brother of MSS) on Mridangam and Balaraman on Tambura - Photo Courtesy Srinivasan Viswanathan (grandson of MSS)*

were known for presenting tough and complicated Pallavi's in talas like Dhruva and Matya. Once their concert was arranged by Chowdiah in a Sabah at Mysore. On that day, Chowdiah was deeply concerned about the Pallavi the brothers had prepared and the testing time he had to encounter in the concert. Unable to overcome the tension, Chowdiah invited the brothers for a lunch to his home. During the interactions after lunch, Chowdiah started mentioning about the various arudhis and eduppus of different Pallavi's. It was then that the brothers demonstrated their Pallavi for the day's concert. After sending them off, Chowdiah rigorously practised it at home and reproduced it precisely and won the admiration of the duo and the audience. No one knew this trick of Chowdiah!.

Chowdiah always believed that student/performer of music should be a good listener. He never missed to attend concerts of seniors or juniors whenever he was free. His presence in the auditorium was an incentive to the young performers to give their best. During the annual music festival under the aegis of Music Academy, Madras he attended the concert of young Ramnad Krishnan in the junior slot in the early 1950 and recommended to the Academy to promote him to the next higher grade. Without an iota

of ego of being a top ranking violinist, he readily accompanied juniors whole heartedly and encouraged them.

His long time accompanist on the Ghatam, late KS Manjunath and his disciples AV Anand and late Bangalore Venkataraman shared with me several anecdotes about Chowdiah. In the year 1948, Bangalore Venkataraman accompanied in the vocal concert of Musiri Subramanya Iyer in a marriage concert of the daughter of Arcot Lakshman Swamy Mudaliar, brother of former Diwan Arcot Ramaswamy Mudaliar with Chowdiah on the violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on mridangam. The host Lakshman Swamy Mudaliar sent a request to Musiri to sing the raga Mukhari. Musiri was taken aback by this request and politely refused as there is a taboo attached to raga Mukhari being a shoka raga not to be included in a marriage concert. Lakshman Swamy insisted by saying "when all the Trimurtis of Karnatac music have assembled here, where comes the question of shoka?". Chowdiah too supported the host. Finally a soul stirring ragalapana of Mukhari and the composition "Shivakama Sundari" of Papanasham Sivan was presented in Musiri's inimitable style. When he took up the neraval, Chowdiah stopped Musiri with a request not to destroy the relishing of his Mukhari by singing neraval and Kalpana



*Mysore T Chowdiah accompanying Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar with Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam*

swaras. This only shows how much Chowdiah was deeply involved in concert and responsible for its overall success.

Chowdiah was fond of old and vintage cars and used to buy them at a price more than its worth although he could buy a brand new car. In the absence of frequent trains as at present, he used to drive to concert places in his car with accompanists. During a return journey from Madurai to Coimbatore, his car developed radiator trouble. He stopped his car by the side of the high way and sent one of his disciple to fetch water for the radiator from the nearby agriculture field. The villagers followed his disciple to the car and prostrated before Chowdiah and were immensely happy that they could atleast see him and expressed their disappointment for not being lucky to enjoy his music. Touched by their love and sentiments, Chowdiah sat on the grass in the field and gave a mini concert to his admirers, farmers!.

Although Chowdiah earned a lot, he was equally a spend thrift. He had no control over his expenditure that on many occasions, he used to borrow from sahuakar (rich man) BK Padhmanabha Rao a musician friend based at Mysore. His hospitality was beyond description. Apart from his family members, his large number of disciples and guests were entertained and lavishly treated by him. He was a good wrestler and in a wrestling competition, he defeated Pahilwan Koppal Basava a famed wrestler of Mysore. On

another occasion, he bumped a Muslim tangawala into the ground like a pumpkin for misbehaving with women passengers.

Like his guru Bidaram Krishnappa, Chowdiah too possessed a large number of disciples learning under Gurukula Vasa. He made all arrangements and comforts to his students in his house. He used to teach each one individually. Senior most amongst them was veteran RK Venkatarama Shastry known for his orthodoxy. Chowdiah had great respect for him and always treated him as his personal secretary. V Sethuramaiah acquired proficiency in playing the 7 strings violin along with Trivandrum CR Mani Iyer (7 strings). KS Alagiriswamy was a leading accompanist to Doyennes MS Subbulakshmi, ML Vasanthakumari and other veterans, Chidambaram Ramanujam and Mrs. HS Anasuya

*Mysore T Chowdiah with SV Narayanaswamy Rao (founder of Sree Ramaseva Mandali, Chamarajapet and one who pioneered the music culture in Bangalore)*





*Photo taken at Bidaram Krishnappa's Ramamandiram 1939. Chowdiah (Centre Hon. Sec) - K Putturao (President) with T Gururajappa - Puttaswamiah and Pankajamma and Mangalamma (Daughters of Chowdiah) - Photo courtesy Shri. K Srikantiah (A home called "Parvathi")*

Prof. V Ramarathnam, TM Puttaswamiah etc. were other prominent disciples who carved niche in Karnatic music. RK Venkatarama Shastri, V Sethuramaiah and Trivandrum CR Mani lyer served All India Radio (AIR) as staff artists. Chowdiah took few disciples along with him on his concert tours to assist him and also to give them concert experience.

Awards and rewards were rained on him during his illustrious career which is the golden chapter of the then Mysore State. The palace decorated him with "Sangeetha Ratna", the Madras music academy decorated him with Sangita Kalanidhi, he was a Central Sangeetha academy award winner, was nominated to the legislative council by the then Chief Minister K Hanumanthaiah, besides instituting Mysore T Chowdiah memorial National Award by the Karnataka State Government. A leading main road in Bangalore is named after him. Chowdiah Memorial Hall is a cultural centre in Bangalore built as a tribute to him.

Although Chowdiah lead a royal and a highly purposeful life, he was unceremoniously removed from the management of Bidaram Krishnappa auditorium, which he so lovingly nourished and served to its peak glory with dedication and devotion investing his time and money after the death of his guru Krishnappa. This

caused great mental agony that affected his health. Whatever may be the reason behind it, still the fact remains that it is an expression of great ingratitude by the perpetrators of that action. This resulted in the establishment of T Chowdiah Memorial Sri Rama Seva Samithi by K Srikantiah, son of Chowdiah's great friend and advocate K Puttu Rao of Mysore. Although half a century had passed since his death, his memory is eternal.

*Mysore T Chowdiah along with Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and the mridangam legend Pazhani Subramania Pillai*





# Young voices to watch

C Ramakrishnan, Chennai

The period of 70's saw many of the all time greats in Carnatic music passing away and the next generation of musicians struggling to catch the position of the by gone greats, resulting in a lull period for Carnatic music and people were sceptic about the future of Carnatic music. But their fear proved to be ill founded and we are fortunate that the succeeding generation of young musicians proved their competence through hard work, intelligence and the best utilisation of technology. The faith in the younger generation got reinforced when I happened to hear some new voices during this December season. I feel happy to introduce the following upcoming artistes to the rasikas at large for they are the musicians who should carry forward this glorious tradition.

## Archana and Samanvi



Teenage prodigies from South Canara district who had their early lessons from late Dr. Ranjani Hebbar and later groomed by Shri Aravinda Hebbar are showing good potentials for maturing into consummate duos. Pliable voice, sruti sudham, dedication, coordination, manodharmam and guidance of Sangita Kalanidhi Chitravina Ravikiran will definitely take them to places. They began their concert for Parthasarathy Swami Sabha with a rare varnam in the ragam Devamanohari. The alapanas of Mohanakalyani

for *Tamadam thagathayya* of Lalgudi Gopala Iyer and Thodi for *Karthikeya Gangeya* of Papanasam Sivan was belying their age and experience. The latter was presented with its cascading sangatis in fact ornamented with neraval and swaras. They also rendered *Iko Namma swami*- a Purandaradas Devaranama in Manirangu popularised by DK Pattammal and *Sarangan Marugane* - the Ragamalika popularised by Maharajapuram Santhanam.

## Master Narayanan



Master Narayanan is a boy below 15 years from Tripunitura (Kerala) presented a very impressive concert in the Ragasudha Hall with adequate sruti sudham, patanthara sudham, manodharmam, confidence and stage presence. Starting with an unheard varnam in Thodi, he went on to present three grand ragas - Gowrimanohari (*Guruleka*), Kalyani (*Pankajalochana*) and Kambodi (*O Rangasayi*) that were much delectable for the authentic phrases, striking brighas and a few innovative sancharams. The boy is presently learning from Trivandrum G. Seethalakshmi and Parassala Ponnammal - who are direct disciples of Semmangudi. Among the other songs, mention may be made of '*Sree Ramya chithalankara*' (Jayamanohari), '*Anathudanu*' (Jingala) with its tricky chittaswaram and

'Hastivadanaya' (Navroz). In the violin, Sree Ramya from Visakhapatnam, the winner of this year's Mudhra Kutcheri competition embellished the concert with tonal sweetness and manodharmam. Mridanga Vidwan Nochur Nagaraj from Kozhikode played with good understanding and anticipation.

### Vivek Muzhikulam



Vivek Moozikulam is another up and coming vidwan who presented a very impressive performance. Vivek Moozikulam is from Cochin who is presently learning from CR Vaidyanathan of the Semmangudi lineage. He is endowed with a pleasant voice capable of negotiating three octaves with ease, patanthara sudham and manodharmam. In his concert for Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, he presented three ragams- Hamsanandi for *Pahi Jaga Janani* of Swati Tirunal, Mukhari, for a rare Tyagaraja kriti *Dalachinandane* and Kambodi for the Sivan piece *Adum Deivam nee arulvay* with neraval and swarams. His voice texture, body language and exuberance reminds one of Abhishek Raghuram. The manodharma elements vouch for his hard work and musical acumen and he is in the right direction to make it big in the concert field. This HCL series concert prize winner for 2017 has performed in other venues and earned the appreciation of seasoned critics. Violin accompaniment by V Deepika, a student of Kanyakumari was engaging and Mridangam accompaniment was by Kishore Ramesh- son of R Ramesh, a senior disciple of Guru Karaikudi Mani and the young lad played with azhuttham, verve and precision. He is also a performer to watch.

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# Compositions of Mysore T Chowdiah

Vid. Manasi Prasad, Bangalore



## The motivation

Recently I was given the responsibility of presenting a few compositions of Mysore T Chowdiah as part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual music festival of the Bharatiya Samagana Sabha, which was dedicated to composers of the Mysore court. Initially I was skeptical. I had not heard too many compositions of his being sung on the concert platform. Not much had been written or said about them, and the few opinions I had heard from musicians offhand gave me the impression that these compositions lacked in complexity (simplistic?), did not provide scope for elaboration, and hence were unsuitable for the concert platform. My mother (a disciple of Prof. V Ramarathnam, who in turn was a prime disciple of Chowdiah) knew a couple of compositions, but I had never learnt them in a structured manner.

I have to admit I was reluctant to take up the responsibility. I requested if I could be assigned

another composer – with my limited time availability, it would be so much easier to present compositions of Mysore Vasudevacharya or even Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, whose compositions have been sung and published by so many. But, no, the organizers said this was an opportunity to take up a challenge.

I started my search on the internet, and to my surprise, I found next to no recordings of Chowdiah compositions. On Youtube, there are two compositions – *Prasanna Ganapathe* and *Devi Poornamangala Kamakshi* – played by Chowdiah himself, which are sweet and short renditions. However, without a vocal version, these were not of much educational value.

I reached out to Chowdiah's great grandson, a friend of mine and well-known flautist Chandan Kumar. He immediately sent me notations to a few compositions. So one morning I started work on these. To my surprise, the compositions were pleasing, lilting and so sweet and easy to sing. With simple yet meaningful lyric and perfect spots for neraval and swara prasthara, I began to wonder why these compositions had not been given their due.

This experience of presenting a concert of Chowdiah compositions has led me to an attempt to learn and record all of Chowdiah's compositions and bring them out on the internet so that they can be sung more frequently on concert platforms and taught to many more students. I plan to complete the project by the end of the year.

## Analysis of Chowdiah's compositions

Prof. Mysore V Ramarathnam's book has notations for 17 krithis and 5 thillanas. I believe there is a book in Tamil that lists 31 of his com-



positions with notations. Overall, he is said to have composed nearly 50 compositions spanning varnams, krithis and thillanas.

Some salient features of his compositions that I have experienced are:

### Lyric

- 1) Languages used are Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit
- 2) Ankita nama used is Trimakuta, a reference to his birth place of Tirumakudalu Narasipura, which is the confluence of three rivers – Kaveri, Kapila and Sphatika Sarovara
- 3) The lyrics are full of familiar, easily pronounceable words arranged in an uncomplicated manner, again providing scope for musical exploration

### Musical structure

- 1) Simple structure, easy to learn and sing
- 2) The ragas used are mainly rakti ragas such as savori, natakuranji, saranga, kalyani etc. which can be explored with manodharma
- 3) While the notations do not have too many sangathis listed, there is ample scope to add more, within the aesthetic framework of the composition
- 4) There are plenty of spots for neraval and kalpana swara
- 5) A few chitteswaras have been given, but again there are many krithis where more chitteswaras can be added
- 6) One can surmise from the flow of musical ideas that these compositions have been created by a performer, and not a theoretician
- 7) These mostly madhyama kala compositions are quite brisk and can brighten up any concert

### Overall

If one reviews the compositions critically, one may perhaps observe that there is no single 'noteworthy' or 'characteristic' feature that distinguishes his compositional style – one could

argue that they seem like 'any other composition'. While this is partially justified, the very fact that these compositions have been created by one of Karnataka's and indeed Carnatic music's greatest musicians means that these compositions form an important part of music history and deserve to be preserved and propagated.

### Reasons for relatively less popularity

In summary, when one analyses these compositions, one wonders why they have not been as popular on the concert platform as compared to the other Mysore composers? Some possible reasons could be:

- 1) Perhaps Chowdiah was much more focused on his career as a performer rather than as a composer, which is why the number of compositions are limited
- 2) As a violinist and an accompanist, he probably lacked the avenues to popularise these compositions (it is easier for vocalists to popularise new compositions in concerts as the lyrics are identifiable)
- 3) Many of his students were also instrumentalists, which again is a limitation when it comes to carrying forward a legacy of compositions

Having said that, there have been efforts to document and bring out Chowdiah's compositions as CDs and books, and several are available. I am sure that with more concerted efforts by musicians, teachers and those belonging to his shishya parampara, we can bring new light to these gems and ensure they secure the place on the concert platform that they richly deserve.

*(The author is a well-known Carnatic vocalist and the museum director of the Indian Music Experience)*





## Lalitha Kala Suma - 2019

SRLKM gave away the 'Lalitha Kala Suma' awards to 62 music organisation across Karnataka for their distinguished service to music on 03 March 2019



# Lalitha Kala Suma - An event to rejoice and remember

Harini Raghavan, Bangalore



For over six decades now, Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, Banashankari – SRLKM has been serving the cause of Carnatic Music untiringly, through concerts, training in Carnatic Music, workshops etc. The organisation's status is that of a "Big Brother" to many younger and up coming music organisations, in the way it conducts concerts and all other activities under the banner throughout the year.

As many of us know, in the recent years many deserving senior musicians, worthy young and upcoming artists have been honoured and awarded under various categories, for their contribution to the field of music. Last year 150 artists were honoured with "Lalitha Kala Suma" awards. This year, the honorary Secretary Sri G.V. Krishna Prasad has gone a step further to felicitate and honour with "Lalitha Kala Suma", 60 plus cultural organisations recognising their service in the field. This is an amazing gesture by him. To honour so many artists and organisations periodically, selflessly, without any expectations, is beyond comprehension! SRLKM takes inspiration from Dr. DVG's poem, 'Vanasuma'. But Sri Krishna Prasad himself represents the 'Vanasuma' described by the great poet! DVG in the last stanza of the poem says, "VipulAshraya-

vanEva suphala suma bharita pAdapadante..." Sri GVK is likened to that tree (pAdapa) full of ripened good fruits, and flowers which offers abundant support to everyone without expecting any return.

For the long time service to the Karnatic music field, SRLKM most deservedly received the most coveted Karnataka Sangeetha Nrithya Academy Award last year. Many organisations have personally honoured Sri GVK lauding his yeoman service to the field.

It was a moment of joy and pride on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019, when Nadasurabhi received Lalitha Kala Suma in the hands of a renowned personality like Dr. Shatavadhani R Ganesh along with the august presence and blessings of HH Sri Sri Yaduguri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeer of Yathiraja Mutt. To receive an award from an extraordinary institution like SRLKM was heart warming. It was a 'Veda-Nada-Jnana maya' atmosphere.

The programme was conducted with all dignity and discipline, organised very meticulously, with no confusion or waste of time throughout.

The felicitation started with a treat of Nadaswaram concert, by accomplished artists Chinnamanur A Vijayakarthekeyan & Idumbavanam V Prakash Ilayaraja and Tavil by Nangoor NK Selvaganapathi and Mettupalayam MS Ravikumar and concluded with a hearty meal – both very well planned once again!

Thanks to Sri GV Krishnaprasad and the team. May his tribe grow like 'Vanasuma'!



# Thatha's fascination for Cars

*MH Anand Kumar talking to Dr.TC Poornima, Mysore  
(Translation credit Rajashree Yogananda, Bangalore)*



To being with, I am the grandson of violin maestro T Chowdiah. I am the son of his eldest daughter Padmamma. My grandfather's stature held me in awe and I revered him and at the same time was intimately close to him. My grandfather had a very strong liking and a soft corner for cars. I had learnt to drive the car by the time I was 14 years of age and in a way had become the permanent driver to my grandfather. I was very proud of the fact that the driver's licence had "son of Chowdiah" printed on it.

It had not come to the notice of my thatha that I could drive the car. It was only because of my grandmother, whom we called thathamma that he became aware of it when she mentioned it casually during a conversation. Thatha did not get angry or annoyed at this information, instead he said "Oh! Let's take the car out and go to Subbu's place to eat". That was the day when I became the driver to my grandfather.

As said earlier thatha liked cars very much and was very proud of the fact that he had his own car. In fact, whenever there was a concert, he always insisted on driving in his own car even if the concerts were in places other than Mysore. Just like his big heart, he made sure that he accommodated maximum number of people while travelling. We were once travelling to a kutcheri in Hassan. There were three of us - thatha, Gopal and I. On the way, he wanted to pick up Venkatachalaiah, and temple priest Binnappa when we reached K R Nagara and so on. Our car would always be packed to the limit. That was thatha.

Thatha always liked to travel very early in the morning. Once after finishing a concert in Hassan, we had to travel to Bangalore. As was the norm, he woke us all up very early and we were ready to leave by 5:30 am. I started grumbling saying that we could leave after finishing our breakfast and coffee. Thatha would have none of that and his ready answer was that we could do all that while travelling on the road. Hardly had we travelled 15 kms from Hassan, we had a flat tyre. We filled air into the tyre and travelled a few miles only to develop another puncture. By the time we were near Kunigal the car had some seven to eight puncture and we had run out of car tubes. There was no way we could proceed further and my hunger got the better of my temper and I yelled at thatha "You are such a famous musician yet, do you have to struggle to travel like this? Why can you not accept the offer of a taxi?" Looking at my pathetic state, Gopal came up with a brainwave. He pointed to the mangoes on the trees beside the road and said "let's fill the inside of the tyre with these mangoes and run the car. We had done the same when I was in military". Such was our state that we were ready and willing to

do anything to make the car run. The master plan turned out to be a damp squib as all the mangoes were crushed before the tyre went one round. Finally, we reached Kunigal taking others help. Thatha was his normal self, showed us a lot of concern and made sure that he first fed us masala dosas. Later, he gave me fifty rupees and packed me off to Mysore.

Another time there was a kutcheri in Hindupur in 1964. As usual, thatha refused the car sent out to him and I accompanied thatha in his own car along with Gopal, Puttaswami and Manjunath. After the kutcheri, we started travelling back to Bangalore in our own car declining their offer of a car. This time, there was also a driver along with us. Hardly had we reached Doddaballapura, there was a snag and the car refused to budge an inch. There was nothing that the driver or any of us could do to set it right and we spent a miserable night sitting inside the car. The next morning, the driver went to Bangalore to bring back tata's favourite mechanic Raju. Within no time, Raju had the car running and we all heaved a sigh of relief. Despite repeated requests from Raju to accompany him in his Chevrolet car, thatha stuck to his stand of travelling back in his very own car. To our luck, we were met with road blocks as the Queen of England was visiting Nandi Hills. We were totally exhausted and could only make it to Bangalore by night fall.

Earlier, all concerts in Bangalore would get over only after 10 o'clock in the night. We would be very delayed by the time we had our prasadam. Many times my suggestion of staying over the night would be turned down with the "how far is Mysore? Let's go". Hence if we left Bangalore by 11 O'Clock we would reach Mysore early in the morning by 3 am. At home, Mangala akka would always be waiting to open the door.

It so happened once after finishing the kutcheri in Bangalore we reached Mysore only to be told by Mangala akka that there was a telegram saying that there was a kutcheri in Mettupalyam the very next day. That was it. Without even a moment's hesitation, he turned towards me and said "come let's go". Already I was exhausted

driving all the way to Mysore and lack of sleep had me in a pitiable condition. Thatha's solution was that he would do the driving. Without another word, I was back behind the steering wheel. I can say that there are many such incidents like this.

In 1963, we had a driver named Chellappa, who was the brother of cinema artiste by name Kuchala Kumari (1950's). We were all travelling to Coimbatore for a concert in thatha's new Chevrolet car along with mechanic Perumal. That was the time when khedda operation was in progress and there were special arrangements for it. We had finished our breakfast in Pachappa hotel in Chamaraja Nagar and had just crossed the Dimbam check post, when we were suddenly confronted by a lone furious tusker. Its trumpeting sent fear down our spine and the driver applied sudden breaks. It could have easily crushed us seeing the state it was in and had all of us terrorised completely. But, thatha was his usual calm self and tried to instil confidence in us at the same time making sure we were all in complete silence. He started meditating as well as reciting Vinayaka stotra. The seconds just dragged on and all of a sudden just as it had appeared it walked away with a long trumpeting sound without giving us a second glance to our immense relief. We later came to know that the elephant had escaped the khedda operation and furious as it had destroyed a check post completely before confronting us.

There was a person named Namboodiri in Guruvayoor, whose son was the disciple of Chembai. Thatha received a special invite for his arangetram and when he arrived at the station, he was taken in a grand procession to their place. They had more than 25 cars parked at his place and thatha gave out an involuntary exclamation. Namboodiri very humbly offered to present a car to thatha to which he replied "Oh! I have a very good car and it is not possible for me to even think of driving another one".

There is another incidence pertaining to His Highness Maharaja Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar.

Once, Maharaja was camping in Bandipur. Thatha was travelling to Ooty in his car via Bandipur that night. The cacophonous sound of thatha's car in the still night woke up his Highness and he came to know that it was 'Chowdiah's car'. Later, Maharaja invited thatha to the palace and enquired if he was interested in purchasing a new car. To this thatha replied "Mahaswami, my car is in very good condition and I cannot find another car like mine anywhere else". Thatha's naivety was such that he could not read between the lines of what Maharaja said and also his dignity and self respect would not have allowed him to take anything freely offered.

Later in 1965, his eldest daughter, my mother gifted him three and a half thousand rupees to buy a new car. Thatha refused. After much persuasion, he relented to buy a new car but from his own pocket.

Talking about thatha's food habits, he was a person who never indulged while eating. His favourite was rasam made with dal and flavoured with coriander leaves. The question of eating in the hotel did not arise at all. He always carried with him cashew nuts, badam and sugar candy. A very disciplined man he would always wash his clothes and would never let me pack the holdall while travelling. Once it so happened that by accident I brushed his violin case against a wall. Never had I seen thatha becoming so angry. He gave me a tight slap and said "what did you do? Couldn't you have been more careful? Mother Saraswathi is inside" was his comment. He made sure that the violin case was always on his lap while travelling in the car. If the violin had to have some repairs done, he would call Rangappa home to set it right but never would the violin go to Rangappa's place.

Thatha had a lot of respect for Brahmins and would politely refuse to accept their namaskarams. Whenever he was in Coimbatore, he would stay at the home of his very close friend VR Srinivasa Rao who used to run the Mysore Ayurvedic Centre. The friend's wife was a very orthodox lady who was very rigid and would follow her set of rules for everything (madi). I was very uncomfortable to eat at their

place as the food would be served from a height to our plantain leaf. I would question thatha and ask why he put up with all these and was it not better to go and eat in a hotel? To this thatha replied "it is not appropriate for you to talk in this manner. It is up to them to follow whatever they believe in. We are no one to change them. Let us recognise the love and affection that they show and not expect anything else in return".

Thatha shared this incident with me which happened to him when he was a student of Bidaram Krishnappa in the early days. In the beginning, all the students would look down on thatha. He not only had to wash the clothes of his guru but also of the cook and other students. He also had to carry the luggage of everyone while travelling. Thatha never complained nor did he feel bad at all. According to him, all these were a learning curve and only helped him on his way to sadhana. He was of the opinion that when there was a community these things were very common.

Once thatha had to play violin for his guru Bidaram Krishnappa's concert. But on that very day thatha had to go to Tirumalakudlu for some work. He missed the bus to travel back to Mysore and even the horse carriage that he arranged gave way. Only his determination to play in the concert made him run seventeen kilometres to reach Mysore. By then, all the disciples of Bidaram Krishnappa requested their guru to make alternative arrangements. Thatha upheld the confidence his guru had on him and was there to play for the concert.

Thatha had received the honour of being 'Asthana Vidwan' from the Maharaja. A car would be sent to bring thatha to the palace. Many a times I would accompany thatha to the palace, but I was not allowed inside as I was still a young boy.

Once there was a kutcheri in Madras and we were staying in the Woodlands hotel. I was reading a newspaper outside the room. I was approached by a very simple looking man in dhoti and he enquired "Is Chowdiah sir there?" I let the person to stand there and went inside



to tell thatha that there was someone waiting for him. Thatha brought the person inside with a lot of respect. After he finished talking to him and serving him hospitably, he took me aside and said that the person I had made to stand outside was none other than Chief Justice Raja Mannar and provided me an insight into how to interact with people.

In a similar manner, when there was a kutcheri in Calcutta, it was one of those times when I sat in the front row and not as usual on the dais. A person sitting next to me asked "do you know him?" I replied that I was his grandson. To which they asked "I very much want to see his violin. Can you show it to me?" during the break, I went up to thatha and repeated their request. Thatha looked at them and said "Can you not recognise who he is? He is sitar Ravi Shankar". That day the concert was attended by pandit Ravi Shankar, Uday Shankar, Lakshmi Shankar and Pankaj Malik who were all sitting in the front row along with me. After the concert, I remember them all holding thatha's violin and getting a feel of it.

My thatha and thathamma made an ideal couple. Thatha would never go against the wishes of thathamma and he has forgone to travel many concert tours abroad as my grandmother was afraid of plane travel. Thatha had this burning desire to play with renowned violin player Yehudi Menuhin and there were opportunities to travel abroad for this. Being sensitive to his wife's fear, he let go of the opportunities. He wished that Yehudi would travel and come to Karnataka so that he could play with him. This just remained as a wish and did not come to fruition.

Whenever thatha went to distant places for kutcheri he would send most of his remuneration by money order in thathamma's name. It was fun watching my grandmother receive it by pressing her thumb in the place of signature. Grandmother would save some money from this and had got herself diamond earrings, a waist belt (dabu) and many other jewellery.

Whenever thatha was at home he would insist that we all sit together to eat. He used to keep

an eating competition during festival days. It was always Bhime Gowda who would come first.

Once Muniswamy Chettiar had come home as he wanted to show his new car to thatha. My elder brother Shivu was a small boy then. He playfully sat inside the car and accidentally, the car started moving forward. This totally scared thatha and he vented out his ire on Chettiar.

It was not in thatha's nature to sit idle at home. He would always be playing the violin and come up with new things. Thatha had once planted lemon plants one in front of his room and the other at the far end of the compound. In a few days time, the lemon plant near thatha's room started growing really well. Thatha then concluded that plants do respond to music. Everyone ridiculed thatha for this and there was even a cartoon in the paper *Thayi Naadu* (1955) mocking this. Now there is acceptance as it has been scientifically proven.

Thatha has been the recipient of many honours and awards. Among them, the Palace had conferred the title 'Sangeetha Ratna' along with gold and diamond embedded Gandaberunda pendent.

On the night of 17 Jan 1967, thatha developed some respiratory problems. No car was available immediately. Somehow arrangements were made to shift him to K.R. Hospital. No special ward was available there and we had to keep him in ordinary ward. Two days later, he slightly opened his eyes and mentioned the names of his sisters Meena and Lilly. He groggily said that Nanji had to be looked after well. He did not want to be on glucose as it was hurting him. Without much suffering, he left us all that night. My favourite thatha had gone forever leaving us all orphaned. I was given the honour and responsibility of performing all the rituals which I did so with utmost humility.

To be honest, I do not think he has left me as I am always surrounded by his memories. Likewise, I have also retained the house where he lived all his life.

Even today, thatha is in that house and I am living with him there.

# Chowdiah is ‘Sound’aiah

Dr.TC Poornima, Mysore  
(Translation credit CP Chikkanna, Bangalore)

Let us first understand the origin, existence and practice of Violin that will set the context for the article. This may pave the way for understanding some of the research work undertaken by Chowdiah. Considering that the Veena was an accompanying instrument during the period of Samaveda, one can understand the importance of stringed instrument. Dakke, Damaru, flute, khombhu (horn), Veena were all of ancient times and it is difficult to determine or decide their origin and existence. Instead, we can search, research and trace their developments, expansion, conversions and transformations over a period of time. This applies to violin also.

Around the world, several groups of tribal communities have used violin like instruments. They were all of local origin and very crude without refinement. These were made by using coconut shells, small wooden dish, wires, fibre etc. and played using matching bows. But none of these primitive instruments could be considered as the original shape of violin, since these have not been classified under basic musical traditions.

Viewed from this angle, we can categorise and compare Indian origin Dhanur Veena, Koorma Veena and Raavana Hastha instruments which employed the usage of bow to play with violin. An arrow fired from a hunter without his knowledge from the thread of the bow producing a melodic sound resulted in the making of Dhanur Veena. Similarly many instruments have their origin and discovered unexpectedly. In the later stages, Dhanur Veena with only 2 strings have been documented in the India's Harappa and Mohenjo Daro civilisation period. Further, the Dhanur Veena is documented as part of traditional music.

Although Dhanur Veena's usage is identified from the period of Harappan culture, in foreign Countries, this type of bow instruments are in use from 15th century onwards. Between 12th and 14th centuries, "Fiddle" with several varieties and types existed depending upon the taste of people's requirements. It was during 1400, the form of modern violin was born and acquired fame universally. An improvised version of violin "Lira da braccio" (Indonesian) resembled the modern violin in many respects though

*Sculpture holding the 'Dhanurveena' at the Agastyeswara temple at Tirumakudalu, built during 8th century AD by Cholas. (Photo courtesy - <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>)*



the overall length of the wood was different and had 3 to 5 strings. Its play was similar to that of violin with shoulder support. Similarly, during the 17th century, a bronze instrument known as "Lira de Gamba" from Italy nearly resembled violin. Likewise, many models and types of violin were in use around the world in music and dance fields. "Bumbers" (Germany) was one such instrument. Instead of strings, a rope was used in the instruments originating from Malé, Mozambique, Ethiopia, West Africa. Two stringed "Rebab" from North Africa, "Kamanja" from Persia, "Strike Fiddle" from Turkey, "Rebab" (from Iraq and Syria), Shrungara, Saarang, Sarinda (India) were all 15 to 17th century instruments. Similar instruments were in vogue in countries like Japan, China, Thailand, Jaawa, Cambodia, Greece, Bulgaria, Norway, Yugoslavia, Poland, England and Ireland. In all these Countries, violin was used as a play back instrument in dances. Later it was adopted in orchestra and for rendering group songs. Strings were used as needed to attain the required volume. Thus there were no restrictions about the number of strings which varied from 1 to 15.

During the 16th century, Gabrielle of Italy introduced this violin in an orchestra ensemble and it acquired the name "Violino". The name was inherited by another instrument called "Viola" that existed in England. Another instrument "viol" belonging to the 16th century made its appearance on the stage. In the middle East, Fiddle originated from Spanish guitarists. In India it seems its name remained as Veena.

Thus, after crossing various stages of development according to the changing requirements, the instrument that is played with the bow on strings stand in front of us as "Violin". In Indian Music, that too in Carnatic music system, violin was in the fore front of folk instruments. It is known by several names Kamaicha, Jantar, Chikar, Sareja, Basam, Pullavan kudam, Raavana-hastha etc. The use of these instruments or the improvised version of Dhanur Veena was reused in the 18th century.

The current day violin is identified by 'Piteelu' and 'kamaanu'. The main wooden timbre box,

neck, sound holes, keys, finger tape, the horse, the wooden piece (chakke), strings, sound pillar all form parts of the violin besides the main supporting wooden hard stick, jave (horse hairs, a key to arrange the tension of jave, wax to stick together horse hairs gives the complete picture of a violin.

In western Countries, it is played in standing posture, whereas in India it is played in sitting position. In India, violin is manufactured in Kolkata. The credit for introducing the European origin violin into Carnatic music should go to Baluswami Dikshitar (1756), the younger brother of Mutthuswamy Dikshitar. Travancore Asthana Vidwan in Maharaja Swathi Thirunal's court further popularised the violin. Swathi Thirunal's court Vidwan Vadivelu, younger of the famed natya charyas Travancore Quartet (1830-1845), Natuvanar, Thirukodikaval Krishna Iyer (1857-1913), Fiddler Malaikottai Govindaswamy Pillai (1931) have all developed violin and popularised it.

Sangeetha Ratna Chowdiah belong to this eminent violinists' group. Had he preferred to remain as a violinist/soloist, he would not have acquired this much of universal recognition and fame. He was far ahead of his contemporaries in his thoughts and innovative mind which was always craving for achieving something new. He never bothered about failure in his efforts. He withstood adverse comments and resisted stiff opposition to his new inventions like a solid rock undeterred. Finally he emerged victorious with a tag "Sound"iah.

In western countries, 4 strings violin was in use as an accompanying instrument for its graceful melody and was a main instrument in orchestra ensembles. The number of strings varied depending upon the requirements for achieving required volume. Hence they used between 4 to 14 strings. None of this usage was within the knowledge of Chowdiah.

Prior to Chowdiah several attempts have been made to increase the volume of violin but not by increasing the number of strings. According to Harikatha exponent C Saraswathibai, Marun-gapuri Asthana Vidwan Gopalakrishna Iyer fixed



a 'Horn' to his 4 strings violin called 'Phonoviolin' to enhance the sound which resembled and sound like a gramophone.

The present violin made its entry into Indian classical music 100 years prior to the entry of Chowdiah. A lot of efforts and attempts were made by players to learn the technique of play and to acquire perfect mastery over the instrument to popularise it both as an accompanying and solo instrument in Karnatic music. None of these players made any experiments to unearth the scope and potential of the instrument to expand its usage in our music. Even if there were efforts, those were not fruitful. Masalamani Mudaliar in the later part of 19th century fixed 5 strings to his violin and tuned it to 'anu mandra shruthi' and played in the vocal concert of Coimbatore Raghava Iyer. The traditional Thambura with only 4 strings used mainly for Shruthi support was added with another 3 extra strings during the life time of Thyagaraja and was used by Shatkala Govinda Marar but this experiment was never tried on violin before. One cannot conclude whether all these experimentations were within the knowledge of Chowdiah. The experiments conducted by Chowdiah were out of compulsion. Let us understand what those compulsions were.

It was in 1911 that Chowdiah made his entry at the age of 16 to Karnatic music. He made his debut as an accompanist to his Guru Bidaram Krishnappa who was blessed with a powerful resonant voice that could reach a gathering of over 1000 enthusiastic listeners. Like Thyagaraja's song "*Naabhi hruthkhandha rasana*" (Shobillu sapthaswara in the raga Jaganmohini), he believed in the emergence of melody from the nabhi, passing through heart and coming out of mouth. His supporting accompanying instrument western originated violin was not at all audible to the vast audience in concerts. This always bothered Chowdiah since there was no sound amplification then.

By 1924, Chowdiah was a top class violinist regularly accompanying his Guru Bidaram Krishnappa besides Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and other leading performers. It was difficult for

Chowdiah to match Bidaram's voice with his 4 strings violin to reach the vast gathering of listeners. Frequent change and design of bows were of no use to enhance the violin sound. On his 4 strings violin he regularly practiced Sarale, jenti varisai, alankaras, Varnas in different speeds, speedy neraval using different gamakas two to three hours a day but his bow never rose to his expectations.

As a last attempt he thought of modifying the instrument instead of tweaking the bow! As a first step he concentrated on the strings by adding an extra string to the 'panchama' string and tried it as a five string violin. The resulting nadha was somewhat satisfying. Enthused by this result, he added two more strings to the other 3 strings. The arrangement was fixing additional strings to 'shadja' and 'mandhya panchama'. He avoided mandhra shadja. The first set was taara shadja- mandhra shadja, second set was madhya panchama - mandhra panchama, and the third one was madhya shadja- mandhra shadja. This improved the overall enhancement of the sound of first three strings. He ensured that the pitch of the strings were in arohana system. This resulted in the flow of melody like a stream.

He discussed this inventive arrangement with his violin manufacturer Rangappa who was a close friend and never felt tired of implementing Chowdiah's requirement and modification of violin. They spent many days discussing the pros and cons of these modifications and finally formed the seven string violin. In proportion to the length and breadth of this new instrument, Chowdiah rigorously practiced fingering and bowing techniques applying equal pressure on the strings and bow. All these developments were out of the notice of his guru Bidaram Krishnappa. The next step was to try it out in concert which was the real proof of the pudding.

In 1924, Krishnappa's concert was arranged in the residence of Veena Sheshanna with Chowdiah providing the violin accompaniment and he had come with the 'saptatanti' violin. Chowdiah was not at ease playing with the modified violin without letting his Guru know. As the concert



*7 string Violin used by Mysore T Chowdiah preserved at the Chowdiah Memorial Hall by Academy of Music, Bangalore.*

started, the somewhat unusual increased sound of the violin distracted the concentration of Bidaram Krishnappa. He looked at the instrument and thundered what is it? Chowdiah said he added 3 strings and made a new formation of the violin. Everyone including Veena Sheshanna were expecting a slap from Bidaram Krishnappa to the disciple. That didn't happen. Krishnappa stopped singing and asked Chowdiah to continue playing. He mustered all the courage and played. Bidaram Krishnappa did not speak but started thinking will this new invention be accepted by music world? Will the staunch traditionalist accept this violin? How can I support Chowdiah? Will Chowdiah face the stiff opposition from the traditionalists etc.

It was later Sheshanna who assured Krishnappa not to bother about it as he was fully convinced of Chowdiah's new invention and its overall success in music field. Subsequently Bidaram Krishnappa appreciates Chowdiah and for the rest of his life the new invention becomes a companion.

Although leading performers like Ramanuja Iyengar, Maharajapuram Viswanatha yer etc. whole heartedly extended their welcome to

Chowdiah's new 7 stringed violin, still there were some musicians who vehemently criticised it as unfit to be used in classical music as an accompanying instrument on account of apaswaras it produced. This stiff opposition and criticism emanated out of jealousy from those who could not digest Chowdiah's instant popularity and domination over other contemporary violinists of that period. According to writer Rajashri, during the annual music conference under the aegis of Madras music Academy's morning academic session in 1947, CS Krishna Iyer expressed his opposition to the usage of 7 strings violin in Karnatac music which produces apaswaras and the sound being very harsh, it was fit enough to be deposited to the corner along with clarinet, Jalatarang, Khanjeera etc. In his reply, Chowdiah strongly defended his instrument and challenged CS Iyer to play all the gamakas on the 4 strings violin and that he would precisely reproduce it with accuracy on his 7 strings violin without a single apaswara! If one doesn't like my invention no problem. When my guru Bidaram and other leading performers have whole heartedly approved my invention, there is no need for me to care and answer sundries, he blasted with full of

anger. He challenged his critics to elicit the opinion of leading performers like Ariyakudi, Alathur Brothers, Madurai Mani Iyer, GNB and the conference president Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer who requested Chowdiah on several occasions to accompany him and how come they didn't notice any flaws in his play? If the critics proved right he is prepared to discard his new invention there itself he challenged. The large gathering gave a thundering applause to Chowdiah's spirited reply silencing his critics. Finally Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer used all his diplomatic skills and vocabulary to console an enraged Chowdiah.

Throughout his long career, Chowdiah dominated the Karnatic music arena like a tiger. By sheer hard practice, innovative approach, deep dedication and absolute mastery over the instrument he earned immense popularity in the field. Always attired in spotless white, after occupying the centre stage and passed the bow over the strings to tune the instrument, the audience were eagerly looking forward to relish his play. Many of them returned home disappointed on noticing a substitute violinist in the place of Chowdiah.

Whatever may be the jealous attitude of local players, maestros like Yehudi Menuhin expressed their surprise as to how Chowdiah could so effortlessly play on his 7 stringed violin when they were struggling on the 4 strings instrument! Once Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar out of curiosity was having a close look at Chowdiah's violin. On inquiry he replied that he wanted to know if any extra strings are attached to the instrument.

Chowdiah's close friend Chambai Vydyanatha Bhagavathar gave him the title "saptha tanthi visharada", GNB gave him the name "Sound"iah, whereas Pudukkottai Dakshina Murthy Pillai called him "Mysore Dore". What more one can expect in life? In the past, Tanjore was hailed as the peak of Karnatic music. Musicians from this area were highly admired by the music world. Chowdiah by his sheer efforts and achievements snatched this credit and elevated the

status of Mysore as the prime centre of Carnatic music.

Enthused by the success of his 7 strings instrument, he tried on a 19 strings instrument. Before that he made a 9 strings violin and later 12 strings instrument. It is only after trying these combinations he took up and tried the 19 strings instrument. Playing it was not so easy. Each string has to be in perfect unison with the pitch alignment. A slight variation in pitch resulted in apaswaras. Once or twice Chowdiah played on this instrument and gave it up later. RR Keshava Murthy also played on this violin.

Chowdiah used main instruments like Veena as his accompanying instrument. Whenever he was invited for solo concert, he used to have either a Veena or Harmonium as his accompanying instrument along with percussive support. The credit of introducing Jugalbandhi goes to Chowdiah who used to occupy the centre seat on the dais and his co players on both the sides. Delivering his Presidential address in 1957 music conference under the aegis of Music Academy, Madras, he justified the seating of his co players by his side. He called upon the main performers to give up professional jealousy towards accompanists and to develop co operative attitude. Performers should not convert the stage into a battling ground. Should never develop the intention of dominating over other co artists. Violinist should follow the main performers like a shadow he suggested.

Chowdiah during his lifetime made lot of sound and justified his name "Sound"iah given by GN Balasubramaniam.



# My brother - Like a blazing Sun

*Impressions of Centurion T Nagamma (Sister of T Chowdiah)*

*by Dr. TC Poornima, Mysore*

*(Translation credit Asha Ramesh, Bangalore)*



*Mysore T Chowdiah's house in Tirumakudalu (Photo courtesy - <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>)*

Everyone at home would call him “Annayya”. None of us had the courage to stand before him and talk to him. It did not mean that he instilled fear in us. With his solid learning, brilliant artistry, charismatic personality we did not have the courage to go near or speak to him. Only Lingappaji (next brother to Chowdiah) would talk to him. He would broach any topic and irritate him. He also, was very gifted. His knowledge over English and Sanskrit was immense. He would experiment on harmonium, would write books in Sanskrit, so was a little confident. He would talk a little bit to Annayya. When it came to his personal thoughts, he was one among us. Had a lot of respect and a great

feeling towards Annayya. That respect instilled with awe and devotion.

This was how our home was. Our Doddava, Chowdiah's mother (Sundaramma) was herself a savant, a scholar in Sanskrit, literature and dramatics, she was perfect in everything. When Doddava passed away I was inconsolable, thought that “Learning had died”. She was really ‘Saraswati-The Goddess of learning’. For a long time, I would go to the place where her funeral pyre was lit, cry and console myself. The mother had justly shared her knowledge among all her children. Annayya acquired music and literature. Lingappaji culture, literature and her knowledge of music. Doddarajanna (youngest of Chowdiah's brothers) had a vast knowledge of music and had a great manodharma in his music. Puttanna (next brother to Lingappaji) was a famous name in music. Thus the talents and capabilities that ran in their blood grew under the umbrella of their interest and opportunities. Annayya had become a titan in playing the violin.

I was younger to Chowdiah by 20 years. I must have been six or seven, I remember, them going to Madras and Trichy for concerts. Madras was like his hometown. He was more renowned among his contemporaries. Annayya's accompaniment on violin with all the big names in the field of music, would bring some kind of amazement in us. We would feel proud too. His Guru Bidaram Krishnappa would teach him with a lot of care.

Annayya and Gururajanna (Chowdiah's Cousin) would sleep in Guruji's house. They would get up at 4:00 in the morning to practice. There was this episode. It seems Annayya would sleep a little away from where Guruji slept. Annayya in his deep sleep would roll and kick or come



*Mysore T Chowdiah's performing with GN Balasubramaniam with Pazhani Subramania Pillai on Mridangam at Sree Ramaseva Mandali, Chamarajpet*

near Guruji and put his hands and legs over him. Though he was inconvenienced, Guruji, being the person he was, would wait till 4:00 in the morning and when it was time to get up, he would move him slightly and he would wake him up. He was so concerned that he thought if he disturbed his student's sleep he would not be able to practice the next day. Annayya had a lot of respect and devotion to Guruji. A rare find in the Guru-Sishya heritage.

One cannot say which was greatest of Annayya's devotion - devotion to Guru, Devotion to God or Devotion to his mother. He never uttered a word against his mother. Sometimes mother would scold him "you are better dead than alive". Even then my brother, the savant would say "What have I done mother that you should say this". He never answered her back. "Leave it at that. If a mother doesn't scold me who will she scold?" He would come and tell us. He had such a big heart.

If Annayya entered when we all sat together and talking, we all would walk away. He would ask

"what girls?" and would joke about any topic. Annayya was not a short tempered person. Never spoke ill of anybody. He would get angry sometimes but would come back laughing. He was not angry or hateful. He was obstinate only where music was concerned.

Once I was singing a Keertaney to myself. Coimbatore Rajappayyer, the great mridangam player was also present. I was not formally trained under a Guru. I was self-tutored and didn't know the nuances. I was singing to myself. Once you start singing on a eduppu, you can't change it halfway through. Eduppu is the place you start the kriti and it can be 1/4 eduppu, 1/2 eduppu or 3/4 eduppu. While I was singing, I changed the eduppu and erred while singing. My brother who was inside and was listening to me got annoyed and said "you are sometimes singing in 1/2 eduppu and 3/4 eduppu Nagu. You are not singing properly". I said "Brother, I didn't know that. How do you sing that?" He knew, I did not have any formal training. He said softly "It is not traditional that you change halfway through once you start on a eduppu," and



*Mysore T Chowdiah's performing with MS Subbulakshmi supported by Radha Viswanathan. Kalpathi Ramanathan on Mridangam and Alangudi Ramachandran on Ghatam*

taught me the correct way. Wherever, however he was, my brother's mind was always unimpeachable.

My brother was not so good at singing. But he was matchless, with his deft fingers on the string. He also played seven strings. The notes would fill out with all the melody. The sound that came from the source would make the sound appear insipid. He would accompany big musicians Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Tiger Varadachar, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. He would play jugalbandhi with Jog, the famous Hindustani violinist. I have heard that he also played on the violin with the world famous Yehudi Menuhin. It did not mean that he was wanting to accompany only the big and famous names in music. They only had to be good musicians. He had accompanied Subbulakshmi too. Why I say Subbulakshmi is she was, like a disciple to him, younger than him. Her mother was Shanmugavadivu, a Veena maestro herself. Whenever she came for concerts with Subbulakshmi, she would come and stay with us. I remember Subbulakshmi once stayed in our house for 5-6 months. She wanted to practice with my brother. Pattammal would also come. Annayya never taught anything. They all would observe him while he played the violin and would practice themselves. Annayya would then listen to them sing and advise them. I would learn along with them.

Annayya would call Subbulakshmi - 'Kunjamma'. Even I called her that. Annayya would encourage

her a lot. He would accompany her in concerts. In Annayya's opinion talent was more important than fame, age and gender 'What of those people who criticised, well can they understand his large heartedness'.

Annayya had several interests. Among them the most unforgettable and that which everyone knew was that he was a "Car lover". He bought many cars. He sold many of them. I don't remember any car running smoothly. We had to push it sometimes in the middle of the night. He would buy only such cars. He could have bought a big car if he had made up his mind. He would change a car to bring another only to push it while bringing it home.

Even though he didn't have a formal education he had a great interest in literature. He composed Keertanas in Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit. He would use the name of our village "Trimakuta, Trimakutavasi" as ankita in his composition. That could have been about himself or in the name of our premier deity Agastheeswara. All of them have been composed cleverly and intelligently.

We could have expected more from him had he been well educated in literature and experienced that would have framed his thoughts better just like Lingappajanna.

From what I saw Chowdiah was a simple human being. He had a lot of self-esteem too. If anyone wanted to listen to him play on the violin he would never disappoint them, but he never



went in search of opportunities. Whether it was a servant or a king he never hesitated. Such a complete scholar. He never went to the palace on his own. The Maharaja would have never refused anything even if he had provided slightest hint of wanting something. Annayya never created an opportunity for himself. He was such a great patron of arts, and so was the artiste. The reason for this was his Guruji who never allowed to beg for opportunities leaving self-respect aside.

The procedure of the palace was that, if the Maharajah wanted something, or one wanted something from the Maharaja a request had to be made through people who were called Darbar Bakshis. My brother didn't like doing that. He never went of his own accord. He stayed away from the palace.

But the Maharaja was a great patron of arts. He would invite the great musicians on grand occasions and bestow them with honours. I remem-

ber we would always get royal treatment. Once the Maharajah had gone on a sojourn to Ooty with his relatives and he had taken Annayya also. He made him stay there for a fortnight, organised a concert for the royal family and honoured him. Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar was very fond of Annayya's music. He had arranged to give the title "Sangeetha Ratna" to Annayya In 1940 on Bhimanamavasya day but unfortunately the Maharajah passed away. Narasimharaja Wadiyar was coroneted during the Dusshera, the same year and In 1941 he bestowed the same title. At that time this kind of honour was something extraordinary.

My brother was the uncrowned emperor of music. He was bestowed with so many titles, so many honours. In Annayya's resplendent eyes, smiling lips, arched postures, above all his dignity was wrapped in the rippling flow of his music. Greatness was heightened. Eminence embodied. My brother was like a blazing sun.

## Chowdiah vs CS Iyer

The clashes between Chowdiah and CS Iyer were perhaps most memorable. They argued most bitterly and repeatedly on the subject of the seven-stringed violin which Chowdiah used. In 1942, when an irate Chowdiah got up with a roar and brandishing his violin like a club rushed towards Iyer and had to be restrained, the conference was adjourned for the day.

In 1947, the two sparred for the last time when Chowdiah gave a demonstration on "the advisability of additional strings on the violin". At the end of it, CS Iyer quoted from his 1941 book 'The Art and Technique of Violin Play' and 'Other Essays on Music', in which he had written disparagingly of such attempts. In response, Chowdiah extracted from his case a violin which had twelve additional strings! He wanted to perform on it and demonstrate his prowess. It could have led to a repeat of 1942, had it not been for the diplomacy of Semmangudi (president of the conference that year). He immediately intervened and appealed for "adopting the golden mean between purity and orthodoxy on the one hand and innovation and progress on the other. While he said he had his own regard for the good work which Mr. CS Iyer was doing on the academic side, he would add his own testimony to the fact of the excellence of the accompaniment of Vidwan T Chowdiah on his seven-stringed Violin

(Courtesy - For score & more, The History of the Music Academy, Madras by Sriram & Malathi Rangaswami)

*(CS Iyer was the elder brother of CV Raman, and father of Nobel laureate Dr. S Chandrasekhar. He was also the founder member of The Madras Music Academy. Iyer was a controversial figure in the world of music. He would intervene frequently challenging others' statements and offer his views and comments while taking part in the deliberations of the experts committee of the Music Academy).*

# S Rajam - Musician, Artist, Musicologist & Teacher

Lalitha Ram, Bangalore

The name S Rajam makes me emotional. It reminds me of all the great time I had spent with the man and his benevolence. I can go on for several pages on what a great human being Rajam sir was. However, in this essay I will try and present an analytical view of his musical style and his contributions. I'll also leave out the details that are typically available in a biodata. Such information is already published on more than one occasion. The prime source of this analysis are the concert recordings and the private recordings that were done during his teaching sessions.

Most of the recordings that are available are after 1980. Some rare younger day recordings of Rajam suggests that he possessed a pleasant and dexterous voice that could produce high speed phrases at ease (e.g. *NadopasanaiyE* rendi-

tion based on '*naada tanumanisham*' for a film song). Even then later day recordings show that he could comfortably sing in all three octaves. Particularly the volume that he retained in the lower octave (e.g. Chitta Swarams touching the mandhra panchama for the Keeravani Kriti '*Velava*') was unique. His recordings also indicate a slight nasal tinge in his voice. Despite his voice being a great asset, he chose not to project it. The focus was always to project the raga or the composition. That perhaps gave his voice the longevity. Even the recordings in his eighties suggest some slowing down due to age but the voice quality remained intact.

In his own words, he was a never a 'platform musician'. Thanks to the stability provided by the job in AIR, he was free to pursue and perform what he liked. His concert approach was



mostly to enrich the listener's knowledge and present the uncommon ragas and songs and popularise them. There is a recording of a radio concert, the concert list goes like this:

3. *Anandamrutakarshini* - Amrtutavarshini (Dikshitar)
4. *Ninu vina e gati* - Shakuntalam (Tirupathi Narayanaswami)
5. *Sri Janaka Tanaye* - Kalakanti (Tyagaraja)
6. *Iha para sukadaayaka* - Vachaspati (Koteeswara Iyer)

I asked him about this rather unusual selection. He strongly felt, AIR was a particularly useful platform to popularise rare songs. He also jokingly mentioned, "If I went overboard, the listener always had the luxury of switching off the radio."

Even in the regular concerts (not lec-dem's), he would introduce the song and genuinely attempt to throw light on the musical highlights of the song. That probably gave a feel of a lec-dem or a music appreciation session than a typical concert experience. That suited his agenda though.

Another popular misconception is Rajam's music was devoid of gamakams. In fact, people who would have heard Rajam speak on this topic might think that he was anti-gamakam. In reality though, one can find quite a bit of gamakams used in his renditions, especially for the ragas that are in true Karnatic mould. He was definitely against the excessive use of gamakams. On scale based ragas he preferred to dwell on the shudha swaras, rather than oscillating them.

Having listened to several recordings, if there was one element that stands out in his renditions, it is the effortlessness. Be it a raga alapana or kriti rendition or kalpana swaras, there is no restlessness or an excitement driven urge to push the limits. He was able to render even complicated musical elements without losing on vishranti.

As a youngster, Rajam was greatly inspired by the raga essays of violinist Thiruvallangadu Sundaresa Iyer. He would often remark, "If you want to know what is absolutely necessary for

the raga, you should listen to Sundaresa Iyer. There is absolutely no wastage." Perhaps that is the reason one hardly finds a raga alapana of Rajam exceeding ten minutes (although a rare recording of a very detailed vasanta raga alapana exists).

The exception to this feature are his AIR RTP recordings. The RTP recordings available are only that of melakartha ragas. The raga is explored over twenty minutes and usually the Pallavi taken is the line from Koteeswara Iyer kriti with the raga mudhra.

Rajam has gone on record to say that both GNB and Madurai Mani Iyer have inspired his music a lot. One would think that the GNB influence would be in the raga alapana and the MMI influence would be in the swara singing. Interestingly, in Rajam's case, the exploration through short phrases, focusing on the purity of notes and long sustained kaarvais are striking features of an MMI's alapana, whereas the vocalisation, crisp sangatis and sarvalaghu swaras of Rajam are more reminiscent of the GNB style.

Rajam's raga renditions of melakartha ragas including the vivaadhi melas is very well known and doesn't need elaboration. He had internalised the swaras so much that he could sing any scale with ease. One of the prime purposes of Rajam's music was to popularise rare ragas. Hence, one can find that rare ragas that are usually sung only as an outline before the kriti rendition, are taken up for fairly detailed exposition. Some examples would be elaborations in ragas such as Veeravasantam, Shakuntalam, Chenchu Kambhoji, Manoranjani, Shudhdha Vasanta. His name is associated with vivaadhi ragas and the rare ragas so much that sometimes people wonder if he did render the usually heard ragas at all. With all the recordings available, one can safely say that he had rendered the likes of thodi, kalyani, karaharapriya, kambhoji and bhairavi quite frequently and extensively as well.

Rajam's greatest passion was to learn kritis from various sources. He had the opportunity of learning songs from very authentic sources



(Ambi Dikshitar, Gowri Ammal, Madras Lalithangi) and in some cases from the composer himself (Muthiah Bhagavathar, Papanasam Sivan). He stayed true to his patantharam in his renditions but never disrespected other sources and variations. He was critical if a rendition was totally against the idea of the composer (e.g. *Nagumomu* in Abheri) but in general was not critical of improving or embellishment with new sangatis.

He was meticulous in knowing the meaning and the intent of the composer. Compositions that are often suffer from butchering can be found rendered with appropriate splitting of the words (Example *Manasuloni Marmamulu*). His repertoire of the compositions of the trinity was enormous. But what was amazing was his penchant to learn compositions of his contemporaries and his juniors. Once, when I visited him, he was winding up a class for his student Akshay Padmanabhan. After the student left, he spoke with pride for over ten minutes about the Tillana Akshay had composed. he would often remark, "AIR might not have given me a lot of money. But it gave me immense satisfaction to learn and propagate rare songs. The famous Purandaradasa song "*Srikanta Enagishtu*" is usually sung in raga Kanada. However, a young girl from Mysore had come for a recital and had sung it in raga Kannada. I learnt from her and rendered in my concerts as well. It was only AIR that gave me such opportunities."

His most known contributions are the renditions of all the 72 Melakarta Kirtanas of Koteeswara Iyer. His recordings covering the entire Ramayana Story based on Ramanataka Kirtanais, the Nandanar Charithram, special programs on Neelakanta Sivan, 20th century composers and Sadasiva Brahmendra compositions are fortunately archived. In fact, he had sung a radio concert on the day of the Kumbabishekam of Kapaliswarar Temple. He had structured the concert in a way that he had rendered a composition on each of the shrine in the temple complex spanning across various composers. He was one of the few to learn the Thirukkural Kirtanais tuned by Mayuram Viswanatha Sastri and sing them in concerts.

On Hindustani raga based pieces, his rendering would include akaara based taans in the middle of a composition. Interestingly, a similar approach is seen in his rendition of Ashtapadi, though the raga rendered is Kosalam.

Another under appreciated facet of Rajam was his tuning for compositions. Rajam had been a part of several programs at the AIR and that provided him an opportunity to tune several songs. He had meticulously maintained two notebooks archiving the programs that were conducted by him. They contained over 600 songs. Most of them were tuned by him and in rare ragas. Noted musician, composer and a famous recording engineer HMV Raghu once recalled a patriotic song tuned by Rajam in raga Vasanta that left a lasting impact on him. In fact, when the first opportunity for composing a devotional album had come to Shri. Raghu, he recalled the Vasanta and set a tune in that raga. The most popular song tuned by Rajam is in raga Madhuvanti - *Sarvam Brahma Mayam*. Perhaps over time, the world would get to see and appreciate his other tunes as well.

Rajam's swaras were almost always in the sarvalaghu mode. There is no attempt to sing rhythmic patterns or ending the swaras with a korvai or a makhutam. He particularly enjoyed singing very long swaras cycles covering the entire scale across octaves in scale oriented ragas. The renditions are replete with janta and dhatu prayogas. In the common ragas, the swara renditions are often brief. There are occasions where he takes uncommon places for Kalpana Swarams (e.g. '*adikaaranandi sevai*' in Kana KaNkOdi).

Rajam's later career saw him give more lec-dems than concerts. His lec-dems were often performed along his students. The lectures were to the point and the musical pieces were rendered to perfection thanks to several rehearsals. People do refer him as a musicologist. One can say, he wanted to restrict his musicological exploration to "applied Karnatic music". He would rather analyse Dikshitar's and Tyagarajar's handling of Ramamanohari and Ramapriya than delve into scales mentioned in



*S Rajam receiving the Mudra Award from Cleaveland Sundaram in presence of Nalli Kuppusamy Chettiar (to his right). Also seen is Mudra Bhaskar on extreme left.*

Brihaddesi. His speech was lucid and frank. He once remarked, "Some people say singing VIVAADHI ragas brings ill luck. Look at me! I'm well past eighty. I'm in good health. I lead a comfortable life. Singing VIVAADHI has not brought any 'dhosham', it has only given me santosham."

Another important aspect of Rajam's career is his contributions as a teacher. He was keen on teaching anyone who was interested. It didn't matter if the student was an aspiring performer or a group at the lady's club. Although I have not learnt from him, I have been a fly in the wall during several teaching session. He would be very encouraging and would even be willing to simplify a sangati that a student would struggle with. On occasions, especially when demonstrating the manodharma aspects of music, would unveil phrase after phrase that would make people around him speechless. I have heard many students say that there wasn't a song that they approached him to learn and he had turned them down. In fact, towards his last days, he gave me a CD with songs recorded during the teaching sessions of Smt. Gomathi. That CD alone contained over 350 songs, including all 72 kirtanas from Kanda Ganamudham.

Having interacted with a lot of musicians in the past sixteen years, I can safely say it is very rare to come across a great musician who is also a

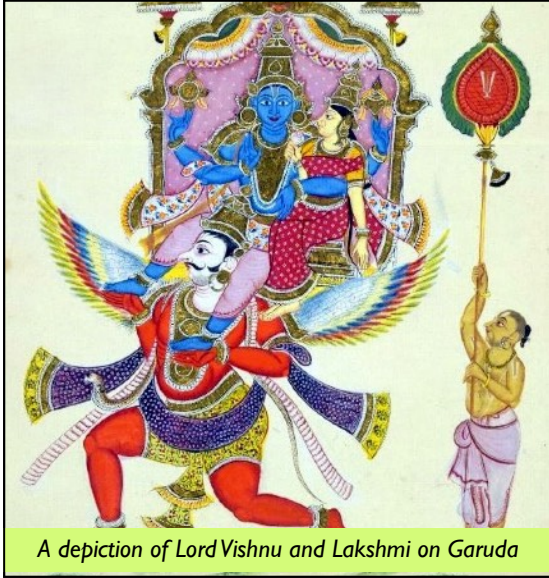
great resource person. Rajam was one rare resource person with a astounding memory till his last days. He would recall readily the singing of Naina Pillai and the playing of Veenai Dhanammal as if it happened a few days back. he had the ability to clearly draw the line between the art and the artist. His opinion on the personal qualities of the artist never came in the way of the musical assessment of artist. He was also one rare person who said he didn't know when asked about something he was not sure of.

When describing the personality of Rajam, it may create an illusion that he was a recluse or a saintly person. In reality though he was a fun loving person who lived his life to the fullest. Greatness sat lightly on him. He preferred to stay away from limelight. Perhaps with time, his contributions will be seen and acknowledged widely.

*(Lalitha Ram is a pseudonym used by Ramachandran Mahadevan for all his writing. He has written many autobiographies of which one on GNB, Pazhani Subramania Pillai, S Rajam are very popular. A material science graduate who did his masters in US has dedicated his life to music. He is a strong force behind 'Parivadini' the YouTube Channel that takes Karnatic music live world over).*

# Divya Desams and Dikshitar

Rajani Arjun Shankar, Chennai



A depiction of Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi on Garuda

“Divya Desams” is the collective name given to the 108 sacred temples glorified by the twelve Azhvars, the great Vaishnavite saints who lived in South India and spearheaded the Bhakti movement. The very word “Azhvar” means one who is totally immersed in his/her experience of divinity. They cut across caste and class barriers and all of them embodied deep devotion to Lord Vishnu. Talking of Vishnu-bhakti, there is one exception though: Madhurakavi Azhvar, one of the twelve, has expressed his deep devotion to his Guru, Nammazhvar, in his verses, and not sung about the Lord directly. Of course this is very much in keeping with the tradition of Bhakti – serving or meditating upon the Lord’s devotees, which is in fact considered more effective and faster in giving results, than serving the Lord directly.

Many of the Azhvars visited various temples of Lord Vishnu, and composed verses on the Lord. The collection of these divine verses is called “Nalayira Divya Prabandham”, which means “the

sacred work consisting of four thousand verses”. These beautiful, evocative verses are in Tamil. If one knows modern day Tamil, these verses can be, with a little bit of effort, easily understood and enjoyed. Apart from the poetic beauty, this collection is also of paramount importance in the Srivaishnavite tradition, an integral part of their daily and festival day routines, and of the rites in all Srivaishnavite temples.

In the tradition of Azhvars and Nayanmars, Muthuswamy Dikshitar of the Carnatic Music Trinity, has also travelled to various temples, all over the country and composed Kritis on the deities. There are some differences. Being an Advaitin, he has not restricted himself to any one God and has composed on many deities, with his underlying principle being that all gods are manifestations of the Supreme Being, the Parabrahman. Another difference is his choice of Sanskrit and the form of the Keertana or Kirti for his expression. Beyond these, like the saints of yore, he too extols the beauty of the Lord, seeks His grace, mentions the salient aspects of the particular shrine and the Rishis, or Gods or devotees who have worshipped there.

Dikshitar has visited twelve out of the 108 Divya desams, as we can infer from his compositions. We have a single Kirti in some of these, while some of the major Kshetras have more. Let’s take a look at some of these sacred spots visited by him and savour the details he has mentioned in the Kritis.

## 1. Srirangam

Srirangam is the foremost of the Divya desams and has been praised by all the Azhvars. In a beautiful paradox, Ranganatha, the Lord of Srirangam, has the glory of being worshipped by Himself, in His Avatara as Rama, since Ranganatha was the family deity of the Solar dynasty. One can only marvel at the magnanimity



of Rama, who gave away this precious heirloom to Vibhishana. Ranganatha faces the south, as a promise to Vibhishana to protect his kingdom.

Dikshitar has, in his masterpiece '*ranganAyakam bhAvayE*' in Nayaki Raga, mentions the salient features of this temple, describing Ranganatha as "praNavAkAra divya vimAnam" (the one enshrined in the celestial Vimana whose form is that of the Pranava Mantra), "dinamaNi kula bhava rAghava ArAdhanam" (the one adored by Rama, born in the Solar dynasty) and "nata vibhIshaNam" (the one worshipped by Vibishana). In the kriti on Goddess Ranganayaki, '*Sri bhArgavi*' he has mentioned that Ranganatha is worshipped by kings, and this too is a very apt description, as this temple has been extraordinarily favoured and patronised by Chola, Pandya and other kings.

## 2. Tirupati

The prominence of Tirupati or Venkata-giri, needs no elaboration. All the Azhvars excepting Tondar-adippodi Azhvar, have sung about this shrine, elaborating on the richness of the scenery here – the forests, animals, waterfalls etc. In particular, Kulasekhara Azhvar's verses wishing to be a tree, or bird or fish and even a stone that forms the step to the Lord's shrine, on this sacred hill, are very poetic expressions of tender devotion.

In his Kriti on this Lord in Purnachandrika "*Sankha chakra gadA pANim*", Dikshitar describes Him as one who delights Goddess Padmavati, and wields the conch and discus as well as the bow Sarnga and the sword Nandaka. Addressing Him as "bahu-tara-vEshAtmaka vigraham" in the Varali Kriti "*SEshAcala nAyakam*", is very apt, considering the myriad ways in which the Lord is decorated, especially during festivals.

## 3. Kanchipuram

Like Srirangam and Tirupati, Kanchipuram too is one of the most important Kshetras. In fact Kanchipuram houses as many as 14 Divyadesams, there being many temples of Vishnu here. Of these, the temple of Varadaraja is of primary importance and this is where Dikshitar has composed his Kritis. The temple is called

Hasthi-giri or Kari-giri since the celestial elephant Airavata became a hill, on which the sanctum is.

The legend of the temple is that Brahma performed a sacrifice in this Kshetra and the Lord appeared as Varadaraja, at the end of the sacrifice. Dikshitar has mentioned in the Pallavi of the Saranga kriti "*varadarAjam upAsmahe*", that He is "vanajAsanAdi pUjitam", the one worshipped by Brahma and other gods. He also describes the importance of the temple tank as "kali dOsha hara teertha prabhAvam" (one whose sacred waters remove the ill-effects of Kaliyuga). There is a special reference to the lord as Lord "garuDa vAhArOhitam", the one who rides the Garuda as His vehicle, and this reminds us of the Garuda Seva that happens in the month of Vaishaka, a very important occasion in this temple.

## 4. Sholinghar

The steep hill that houses the shrine of Yoga Narasimha is called Ghatikachalam, since it is believed that spending even a Ghatika span of time (24 minutes) on this hill, can help us obtain the grace of the Lord. The Azhvars have referred to it as Ghatikai.

Dikshitar in his Kriti in Mohanam "*narasimhAgaccha*", requests Narasimha to come, to appear right away ("narasimha! Agaccha!"), the way He did for the sake of Prahlada, one may imagine. He refers to Him as "ghaTikAcalESvara", the lord of Ghatikachala. The name of the Vimana in this temple is Hemakoti Vimana and we see the epithet "hEma kOTISvara" (the Lord seated under the Hemakoti Vimana) in the same kriti.

There is an important incident that connects Lord Varadaraja of Kanchipuram to Sholingar. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a great devotee Doddacharya in Sholinghar, who would visit Lord Varadaraja during the annual festival (Brahmotsavam) every year. Once, when poor health disallowed this, on the day of the Garuda Seva, he sat near the temple tank here, thinking of the event. Suddenly, Lord Varadaraja appeared before him, granting him a Darshan of the Garuda Seva, and during this time, He was not visible in Kanchipuram. This incident is reenact-

ed every year during the festival in Kanchipuram and the lord is screened for a few seconds marking his visit to Sholinghar for his ardent devotee. There is now a temple for Varadaraja in Sholinghar in the same place. Dikshitar captures this event in a wonderful phrase in the same Kriti, “surucira kari giri varada vicara” (the one who appeared as Varadaraja).

##### 5. Tiruvallikkeni

Traditionally known as Brndarayam (forest of the holy basil), this Kshetra is now part of Chennai city. This is where the Lord of Tirupati fulfilled the prayers of King Sumati and showed him His form as it was in the battlefield in Kurukshetra. Hence the Lord is called Venkatakrisna and also Parthasarathi (the charioteer of Partha or Arjuna). Goddess Rukmini stands beside Him and, in a unique sight, others of His family - brothers Balarama and Satyaki, son Pradyumna and grandson Aniruddha also flank Him.

Dikshitar has spent some years in Manali, and is said to have visited Tiruvottriyur and Tiruvateeswara temples, and so also Tiruvallikkeni, all of which are part of the same city now. He has, in his Kriti in Suddha Dhanyasi “*Srī pArthasarathinA*”, described the Lord here as the one who enchants the Gopikas with the flute, delights Rukmini and is sung by Narada and Tumburu.

##### 6. Chidambaram

Chidambaram is famous for the shrine of Nataraja, but the same temple also has the shrine of Vishnu as Govindaraja, whom the Azhvars have praised. When Shiva came here to

dance, to subdue Goddess Kali and fulfil the prayers of sages Patanjali and Vyaghrapada, Vishnu came here to enjoy the dance. The Azhvars have described the three thousand sages worshipping Him. The place is known as “Tiruchitrakootam” in their verses.

Dikshitar, in his Mukhari kriti “*gOvindarAjAm upAsmahE*” describes the Lord as one residing in “*cidAkAsa grhE*” (the abode of inner space, another name of Chidambaram) and also as “*dEva kanaka sabhESa mitram*”, the dear friend of Shiva, the Lord of the Golden Hall. In the Surati kriti “*gOvindarAjAya namastE*” we find a phrase “*dESika nuta varadAya*”, the giver of boons, extolled by Desika. Although Desika can mean any preceptor, there is room to interpret this to mean Sri Vedanta Desika. According to the temple legends, the shrine of Govindaraja was closed down in the 12th century by Kulothunga Chola II, and in the 16th century, based on the Srivaishnavite saint Vedanta Desika’s request to Gopannarayana Udayar (vassal of the Vijayanagara rulers and chieftain of Gingee), the shrine was renovated and worship resumed.

As always, Dikshitar’s Kritis offer a lot of ideas to meditate upon and gain new insights.

To be continued....

*(Transliteration scheme has been followed only for the words taken from the Kritis of Sri Dikshitar. Part 2 of this article will be about the other six Divya desams.)*

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## Homage to T Sharadha

Senior Veena Vidwan and sister of Musicologist T Sachi Devi (Tirumalai sisters fame), T Sharadha passed away on 07 Mar 2019. She was 80 yrs. She served as the head of Music Dept. at Maharani’s college, Bangalore and also authored “Karnataka Sangeetha Darpana”

Team SRLKM recognises her contribution and passes on our condolences to the family members.



## Kalavanta 2019 Awardees

Sitting from Left to Right - Aravind Srikanth Raja(Mridangam), KP Nandini (Vocal), V Deepika (Violin)



# Spring Music Festival - 2019

