

# Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman - A True Nadopasaka

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Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman - shall I say, also 'Layaraman' - is a phenomenon in Carnatic Music and, therefore, he has become an endearing household name. To write about this musical personality will run into volumes and volumes, and yet the attempt will boil down to exposing the tip of the iceberg only. However, before getting down to a thumb-nail sketch of the 'Bow-Raman' of this century in Carnatic Music, I wish to make a fervent appeal to Sri Krishna Gana Sabha - the one Sabha in the city doing all its best in promoting our Fine Arts and tapping and encouraging young talents (to rear the second-line leadership) with two series every year-to take the bold initiative to produce a documentary film on this all-time great violin maestro of international repute.

It is said by some wit that bringing out the full aesthetic beauties of Fine Arts is intself a Fine Art. This is undoubtedly more than 100% true of our beloved Lalgudi Jayaraman. I would now like to project this musically picturesque personality in some sequential order.

## **Lalgudi, the Trail-Blazer-or Style-Blazer?**

As a humble rasika given to the unique pleasure of listening to Lalgudi over three decades continuously, I would aver that Lalgudi, with his advent on the Carnatic Music horizon, has blazed on entirely but refreshingly a new style-and unique at it-with full of aesthetic tonality and other allied musical elements. So ever since the 'evolution' of the new style by Lalgudi, violin playing has surely gone a long way off from where and what it was till the

other day, only "the old order changing, yielding place to what is really and most pleasureably new". There is also the third dimension to it in Lalgudi's music.

The sharp and sweet tonal clarity in Lalgudi's violin can be attributed to smooth bowing that is free of the jarring harshness. It is also no exaggeration that Sri Jayaraman has simply 'enslaved' the violin to his every musical command by which he is effortless at harnessing amazing varieties of tonal shades and colours of sheer poetic beauty. A close intuitive observation would reveal the 'infectious' impact his 'cool-breeze' style has produced on the upcoming young violinists-no less on the rasikas-who have profitably adopted and adapted it. To tell the truth, there was only one Ekalaiya to Drona, but to Lalgudi Ekalaiyas are countless.

## **Lalgudi, the Ideal Accompanist**

When Lalgudi came to the field, it was already completely dominated by the seniormost violinists - like the late Dr. Venkataswamy Naidu (the lone soloist), Chowdiah, Kumbakonam Rajamanickam Pillai, Mayavaram Govindaraja Pillai, Thiruvallangadu Sundaresa Iyer and so on. So it was no cake-walk for Lalgudi who had to work his way up to reach the zenith just the hard way, swimming against the currents of many odds.

Lalgudi's foremost asset is his photographic memory to 'carbon-copy' the main artist - be it vocalist or instrumentalist - and this soon established him as the most ideal accompanist. As a result he was in constant demand which he had to meet

with a lot of strain, racing against time. Also Lalgudi's accompanying ability was more than matching the main artists. However, it should be mentioned here that Lalgudi is totally different as an accompanist and soloist. In other words, it is never the case that his individual style as a soloist would ever show up when he is there as the sideman or accompanist. This is yet another unique feature of Lalgudi.

It is relevant here to recall the honest observation of a great musician (who unfortunately is not with us), himself a stormy trend-setter of a distinctly unique new 'bani' with his cascading music. The observation made was: "Lalgudi is a perfectly square musician and vice versa with a complete comprehension and grip over the nuances and intricacies of Carnatic Music." Yet another musician of repute aptly described Lalgudi as "the musician of this Century". The latter mentioned musician is a wizard in pallavis with an uncanny ability to execute any type of pallavi at a moment's notice.

### **Lalgudi, the Soloist**

From that of the ideal accompanist, Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman, in no time, graduated into an outstanding soloist. But violin solo concert demands special skill on one's part. In this Lalgudi's skill and sustain the listeners' interest is superb. He has never failed to succeed in giving solo soirees for three/four hours with his vast sweep of repertoire of kirtanas and ragas - sometimes rare ragas and kirtanas. With his total involvement, he is always at giving his best in every concert. He is a great believer in presenting his concerts most meticulously and methodically to meet the great expectations the rasikas come with to his concerts.

Lalgudi's concerts are mostly in slow-tempo though he is equally at ease

with fast tempo. Though endowed with a spring of imagination, Lalgudi never overlaps in expanding ragas which unfold at his hands in a beautiful organic order. (I would even prefer to describe this method of raga elaboration as a subtle form of 'musical education' to the layman). Kirtanas and niraval and swara-p-pras-tharams would proceed from his violin only at an even pace without suffering fluctuations, from beginning to end. The pallavis he presents, though full of intricate rhythmic patterns, are tidily executed.

In typical vocal style only Lalgudi presents his music and most articulately with full of aesthetic beauty.

Lalgudi alone perhaps has created history in Carnatic Music by participating as accompanist in the 'fire-ordeal' Simhanandana and Ata Thala Pallavi demonstrations by the late Mudikondan Venkatramayyer way back in 60s, at the Music Academy. At the end of these long, winding and jig-saw-puzzle Pallavis (on two different occasions, of course), which were well-rehearsed by him for days at home, the late Iyer poured paen of glowing tributes on Lalgudi for his absolute laya proficiency to his very finger tips. There were others too, like the late Alathoor Brothers, Madurai Srirangam Iyengar, Ramnad Krishnan, who tried their well-prepared intricate and intriguing Pallavis at Lalgudi only for the latter (Lalgudi) to emerge in flying colours. In short, Lalgudi has layam running in his veins and blood.

### **Lalgudi, the Innovative Genius**

The Violin-Venu-Veena tie-up is the very manifestation of Lalgudi's innovative mind which, though shortlived, was a grand success with more than 100 concerts. His innovative mind fanned up further, and as a result Jugabandhis came up, Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman figuring in the company of

Hindustani Music Titans like Sitar Vilayat Khan and Sarod Amjad Al Khan. By this endeavour Carnatic Music has been exposed in a better light to our North Indian brethren (incidentally Lalgudi and the Indian artistes are doing their bit in practically promoting national integration). Whether it is a jugalbandhi with Sitar or Sarod, it is to be witnessed to be believed how Lalgudi effortlessly matches them or leads them, answering their musical idioms with the equivalent Carnatic ragas' idioms. Thanks to Lalgudi for his relentless Herculean efforts in conducting jugalbandhis that have indeed caused a sense of awareness to more and more understand and appreciate Carnatic Music and its greatness.

#### **Lalgudi, the Composer**

Lalgudi's thillanas and varnams are already popular, and so it is pointless to talk of their greatness and the monumental contribution he has made to Carnatic Music, thereby enriching it further. However, I would like to mention that his varnams, and more especially the thillanas are distinctly different in get-up besides being tightly rhythm-packed with musical nuances as well. It is a feather on his hat that Lalgudi's thillanas are popularly figuring in our Bharatanatyam performances, and perhaps that is way they are aptly captioned "The Dance of Thillanas".

The brilliant innovative genius of Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman is very much at play in 'fusing' the Western instruments with the Indian musical instruments to provide the majestic gait of background music to his

thillanas. Here again, before his thillanas open up, the background music starts with a stringed or percussion instrument-both Western and Indian-that comes tilting and tilting the listener with ecstatic joy. As a class these thillanas stand out, and they are bound to stand the test of time, too.

#### **Lalgudi, the Ace Guru/Tutor**

Art can never grow with those who have grown out of it through cheap short-cut methods. The stickler he is, only after thoroughly satisfying himself with the accomplishments of his son and daughter, as well as his sister, with his (Lalgudi's) personal rigid discipline in Carnatic Music, he has allowed them to come to limelight to shine as they do now. This is no less true of his other disciples. Despite all his incredible achievements, which have surely not gone to his head, Lalgudi is unremittingly still on his musical quest with that of the true metaphysicist's insatiable inquiring mind to further fathom the ocean-depths of our Carnatic Music. And the true Nadopasaka he is, "the best yet to be" for him.

This is a tribute from a humble rasika having no pretensions to the grammar of Carnatic Music but to its aesthetic beauties which Lalgudi's music bubbles with.

In conclusion, I sincerely pray to God Almighty for His choicest blessings with all Mangalam to shower for ever and anon on Lalgudi and his entire life.

Long Live Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman and his family.

Subhamastu