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A dance of rhythm and melody

Author: Lalitha Sri

The soft strains of Dwijawanti come wafting in, the melody melts all, the technique strong but subtle and submerged, the invisible bow so smooth it is simply unfelt... the "violin that talks" intones balagopala yamunavihara... This image needs no tagging, the lyric needs no mudra... it's unmistakably Lalgudi!

Smt Vijayalakshmi's Lec-Dem on the compositions of her father and Guru Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman was, within the given timeframe of 45 minutes on Dec 20th at Music Academy, a feat in time management, given the vast scope of the topic. She brought out the quintessential Lalgudi characteristics, the primacy of melody with the subtlety of grammar that recedes to the background, its beauty becoming obvious only when pointed out.

In the Lalgudi varnam compositions, the notes and the text went hand-in-hand. The third svaram was very special as exemplified in his Nalinakanti composition. There is no karvai, there is shadjavarjam without touching sa, and the svara patterns are liltily, interlacing with each other to create the Lalgudi magic. Another example is Devagandhari composition, in which, without karvai, phrases coming from the higher note down, but the movement is upward.

His Pada-Varnam ingeniously combines exuberance with the understated joy of the nayakibhava. The music and the lyrics create the mood together, juxtaposing the high tide on full moon and the dewdrops under the cool moonlight with musical phrases appropriate for each textual phrase. The amazing Shanmukhapriya Pada-Varnam is structured like a necklace (haaram), with 15 notes on either side of the central pendant. Used on the dance stage, the signature style of these varnams is their gait.



Ullasanadai or oyyaranadai are handled to suit the particular ragam. The genius of Lalgudi uses svarakshara-poruttam to the hilt.

Though tillanas typically do not have sangatis, Lalgudi tillanas use sangatis, providing ample scope for the danseuse's footwork, and 'ornamentopia' in sangitam to enhance expression of content.

An amazing revelation was the story of transformation of the Neelambari varnam, originally composed as Tanavarnam, converted into a Padavarnam with Tamil lyrics, without changing a single note!

Of the four tillanas set to misrachapu talam, each had a different opening and distinct character of its own. Pahadi comes with a very soft handling with little focus on kanakku. Misrasivaranjani stands out for its korvai and sruti-bedam.

What stands out in his compositions are the aesthetics and raga bhavam, and beyond everything else, the composer's human quality. He was every bit the ideal Vaggeyakkara as defined in the Sangita Ratnakara.

Delivering an immaculate lecture punctuated by apt singing interludes, she said with the inherited humility, that it was her attempt to contain an ocean in a conch (samudram in sanku). Perhaps this should be the opener in a series with sequels following, to do justice to a master composer and magnificent artiste. It could then bestow on the rasika the refinement to experience the ecstatic dance of the rhythm and melody, on the way to what Lalgudi Jayaraman himself enjoyed as 'everlasting bliss'.



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1

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