

LEC DEM MELA

A tour-de-force of Tyagaraja

The Sruti Foundation and Karnatic Music Forum jointly organised Lec Dem Mela 2017 at the Arkay Convention Centre on 9 and 10 December to mark the 250th birth anniversary year of Tyagaraja. The series was supported by The Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Visually challenged young musicians of the Freedom Trust—Akshaya, Shreelekka, Manoj and Nagaraj (all students of Dr. S. Sunder)—gave a flying start to the proceedings with a Tyagaraja kriti rendered as an invocation.

Chief guest Akhila Srinivasan, Managing Director of Shriram Life Insurance Company and Director at Shriram Capital, presented scholarships administered by the Sruti Foundation to deserving young artists. The Manna Srinivasan Endowment Scholarships for an instrumentalist and a Bharatanatyam dancer were presented to vainika Ramana Balachandhran and P. Sundaresan respectively. The Meenakshi Ramakrishnan Endowment Scholarship for a young vocalist was given to Sahana Samraj.

Four lecdems were held each day—in the morning and evening—and they drew a very good response, especially from young musicians. The resource persons had done enough groundwork to make their presentations enriching and enjoyable. They shared a wealth of information on the compositions of Tyagaraja. Their lectures were aptly supplemented with music by their disciples.

Dr. Sriram Parasuram focused on the topic “Raga creation of Tyagaraja”. He remarked that we are fascinated by Tyagaraja’s intelligence, analytical ability, poetic capability, musical prowess, and laya

expertise. The ragas Kharaharapriya and Harikambhoji owe their existence to the genius, he said. He was the first to compose kritis in many melakarta ragas like Ganamoorti, Manavati, and Vakulabharanam. He created nearly 82 new ragas such as Jayamanohari, Manjari, Andolika, Malavasree, and Vijayasree (to name a few) following basic tools like *varjya* (omission of certain swara), *vakra* (non linear), *janya* (part of a whole), *anga* (mixing of many parts), and *anya* (something from outside). Some examples he cited: Chandrajoti is formed by omission of the nishada of the 41st melaraga Pavani. Vijayasree is formed by the varjyam of dhaivata of Varali. Raga Andolika is a fascinating creation where the gandhara and dhaivata are varjya in the arohanam and the panchama and gandhara are varjya in the avarohanam. The hallmark of his creations is the amazing blend of sahitya-sangeeta bhava. A unique feature is that the full scale of the raga as also the rhythmic gait are unfolded in the pallavi itself.

R.K. Shriramkumar handled the topic “The vision of Raga in Tyagaraja’s compositions”. Tyagaraja’s kritis give the contours of the raga clearly, they show how to handle a gandhara, panchama or madhyama in Sankarabharanam. He demonstrated select portions from various kritis. In Begada, there are many kritis in which Tyagaraja shows how the madhyama can be handled in a diverse manner. Only a genius like Tyagaraja could imagine a phrase like *Sarasijasana sanandana vanditankhri* in the kriti *Lokavanachatura* in Begada. If you take raga Devagandhari, its colour, gait and approach vary in each kriti composed by the bard. Many rare ragas are known to us only through



Sriram Parasuram

his compositions. The treatment of vivadi swaras in Gangeyabhooshani, Vagadheeswari and Chandrajyoti was clearly demonstrated.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan made a presentation on Tyagaraja’s musical opera *Nauka Charitram*, assisted by Jhanani Mahalingam. The geya natakam contains many gadyams, padyams, viruttams and simple keertanams in Telugu called daru which are composed in rakti ragas like Pantuvarali, Saurashtram, Surati, Sahana, Punnagavarali, Neelambari, and Ghanta. Tyagaraja has used many folk dance forms in this opera like kolatta daru and kummi. *Nauka Charitram* describes a boat journey by the gopis along with Krishna, in the river Yamuna. As they sail, the gopis become arrogant and tease Krishna. He teaches them a lesson in humility when they are caught in a strong hurricane and the boat capsizes. Krishna reveals himself, the gopis shed their arrogance and finally worship Him. There are totally 21 keertanams and select portions of

the songs were presented with the original flavour.

Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan and Vijayalakshmi dealt

with “Sangatis in Tyagaraja’s compositions”. At the outset, they mentioned that their lecdem was based on the wealth of Tyagaraja’s compositions they inherited from their great grandfather Lalgudi Rama Iyer, a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Sangatis can be interpreted as creative melodic progression, and aesthetic expression for enhancing the lyrical value and musical appeal of the kritis. You can find a logical development in the sangatis in Tyagaraja’s compositions. Sangatis are possible when the line is not packed with too many words and there is space for enough karvai. They demonstrated how sangatis are more attractive in madhyama kala kritis. Tyagaraja introduced a new concept called Desadi tala or 1-½ edam. Such kritis have, symmetry, provide visranti and peppy sangatis (*Raghunayaka*). Various methods have been adopted by Tyagaraja while creating sangatis: in kritis like *Dayarani*, and *Easa Pahimam*, they are in the form of question and answer. In *Idi samayamura* in Chhayanata and *Bhajare bhaja manasa* in Kannada, the second line of the pallavi is a repetition of the refrain with a punch. In the Sahana kriti *E vasudha*, the pallavi is replete with sangatis to convey the message of the song, while the anupallavi does not have sangatis. Similarly, in the kriti *Chakkaniraja*, sangatis are given for the first line of the pallavi: *Chakkani raja margam* whereas the second line *sandula* does not have any sangati. In the kriti *Brovabharama*, sangatis are given for the phrase *Raghu Rama* which sounds like a namavali. In new ragas like Manoranjani (*Adukara*) the sangatis are used to reveal the various facets of the raga. *Darini telusukonti* is noted for the adukku



Shriramkumar with L. Ramakrishnan (violin) and N. Manoj Siva (mridangam)



Sujatha Vijayaraghavan with Jhanani Mahalingam (vocal support), Karaikkal Venkatasubramaniam (violin) and H. Vineet (mridangam)

Lalgudi G.J.R. Krishnan and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi with H. Vineet (mridangam)



sangatis which enhance the beauty of the kriti. Some sangatis add to the vibrancy of the lyrical content, for example in *Yochana kamalalochana*. In some songs, akara sangatis are used to enhance the beauty of the kriti, like in *Marubalka*, and *Adamodi galada*. The cascading sangatis in *Najeevadhara* bring about a symphony effect as also enhancing the emotional appeal of the song.

Mridanga vidwan **K.S. Kalidas** threw light on the “Laya intricacies in Tyagaraja kritis” with the vocal support of Aiswarya Sankar

and Brinda Manickavasagam. As a vaggeyakara, Tyagaraja was unparalleled in layam. Most of his kritis suit the madhyama kala tempo of singing. However, he has composed in all the tempos suitable to the sahitya bhava reflected in the kritis. Although the majority of his compositions are in Adi tala, he has also employed other talas like Roopakam, tisra Triputa, misra Chapu, khanda Chapu, misra Jhampa, in different nadais and kalais. Many kritis which are now sung in Roopaka tala were originally composed in Adi tala tisra nadai.

Dasukovalena in Todi is the best representative for misra Jhampa which lends itself beautifully to elaborate niraval, swaram and tani avartanam. He used Desadi tala in a good number of kritis. In some of his Adi tala kritis, the second line of the pallavi ends with the arudi and the rest is sung as akara. for example, in *Nannupalimpa* (Mohanam) and *Upacharamulanu* (Bhairavi). He has employed different eduppus—ateetam, anagatam, onnu talli, rendu talli, moonu talli, etc. The eduppus vary even within a kriti as in *Raju vedala* (Todi).

While pondering the “Kriti format of Tyagaraja”, veteran scholar



K.S. Kalidas with Brinda Manickavasagam, Aishwarya Shankar (vocal) and L. Subramanian (mridangam)

R.S. Jayalakshmi, assisted by Swetha Balasubramanian, made a comparison of the compositions of Tyagaraja with those of Dikshitar and Syama Sastry on certain key aspects. The credit for introducing the pallavi-anupallavi-charanam format

of the kriti can rightly be attributed to the Trinity. But within the kriti, the format of Tyagaraja kritis varies vastly—from the simple kriti to weighty kritis like *O Rangasayee* and the Pancharatnams. The ghana raga Pancharatna kritis are comparable to the swarajati format of Syama Sastry. Among the Pancharatnams, *Sadhinchane* follows a varnam pattern—where after each charanam it lands in the charanam refrain *Samayaniki*. *Jagadanandakaraka* offers enough patterns to formulate kalpana swaras. His kritis provide enough inputs for a musical student to formulate raga alapana, tanam, niraval and kalpanaswaram. Just like Dikshitar, Tyagaraja also employed madhyama kala in many of his compositions either as a part of the charanam, or in a section of the kriti. Another format used by the bard is pallavi and multiple charanams in varying dhatus like *Sree Raghavaraprimeya* in Kambhoji and *Brochevarevare* in Sreeranjini. His utsava sampradaya keertanams and divyanama sankeertanams have multiple charanams in the same dhatu. They are in simple language and melodies suitable for congregational singing.

Dr. S. Sunder spoke of “Tyagaraja’s nadopasana”. He had the vocal support of J.B. Keerthana Shriram and flute accompaniment of J.B. Shruti Sagar. He mentioned compositions of many vaggeyakaras like the tevarams of Gnanasambandar



R.S. Jayalakshmi with Swetha Balasubramanian

S. Sunder with J.B. Keerthana (vocal support), J.B. Sruthi Sagar (flute) and Poongulam Subramaniam (mridangam)



and Sundarar on the abstract form of music and presented Tyagaraja's compositions extolling saptaswaras. For Tyagaraja, Rama and music are inseparable. In the Arabhi kriti *Nadasudharasa* he says that Rama is the music, his kodandam (bow) is the raga, saptaswaras are the bells in the bow, ghana, naya and desiyam are the ropes of the bow and gati is the arrow from the bow. In the kriti *Mokshamugalada*, Tyagaraja describes Lord Siva as a great exponent of veena music. In *Nadatanumanisam*, Tyagaraja says that the saptaswaras emanated from the five faces of Siva. In the charanam of *Swararagasudharasa*, Tyagaraja says that knowledge about the nada that originates from the nabhi is the blissful liberation.

The **Malladi Brothers** opened their lecdem on "Rare compositions of Tyagaraja" with the kriti *Mitribhagyame* in which Tyagaraja says that he experiences goosebumps when he sings the alapana of new ragas. Most of the kritis composed by Tyagaraja in new ragas are in Adi tala 1-kalai, which could mean that ragas like Saraswatimanohari, Jingla, Keeranavali, Takka, Malavasree, Deepakam, and Veeravasantam do



Malladi Brothers with B.U. Ganesh Prasad (violin) and Tumkur Ravi Shankar (mridangam)

not lend themselves to extensive elaboration. When the Telugu poets considered him only as a musician and were not appreciative of Tyagaraja's creations, scholar musician Sripada Pinakapani challenged them and undertook research to find that Tyagaraja had made 18 different types of sahitya prakriyas. The brothers presented many rare kritis of Tyagaraja explaining the contextual meaning and cautioning against wrong splitting of words. Referring to the kriti *Padavini sadbhakti* in Salagabhairavi, they mentioned that the song is more appropriate for

rendering in vilamba kala as against the present racy gait prevalent in concerts. They mentioned that certain kritis which have emotional content should not be loaded with heavy swaraprastaram. Some musicians sing *Nadupai* as the mangalam as it is in Madhyamavati. The Malladi Brothers made an interesting observation that Tyagaraja was deeply anguished and poured out his despondency in the song when the house was divided by his brother, and hence this kriti does not fit well for an auspicious mangalam.

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(with inputs from S. Sivaramkrishnan)

PHOTOS: S. JANAKI