

He was unique

SRajam always seemed to have a lot of time because he never wasted his time or that of others. Punctuality was a remarkable trait with him. During his spare time in All India Radio he would be reading reference books and jotting down notes in a diary—for a painting or for a musical drama he was planning to record.

Even at his Mylapore home we would find him painting at his desk. If he was busy teaching or planning a programme, he would politely ask us to wait and then devote his full attention to us and share his valuable inputs.

Working with him in All India Radio was a pleasure. While dealing with fellow musicians he was always to the point and never digressed from the job at hand. He tuned Sadasiva Brahmendra's *Sarvam brahmamayam* in Madhuvanti. Voleti Venkateswarlu heard it and liked it so much that he called me to AIR-Vijayawada and recorded it for broadcast. Voleti was really effusive about the felicity with which Rajam had handled the composition and repeatedly appreciated the swarasthana suddham of Rajam's style of singing.

Whenever I invited Rajam to preside over the concerts of my sishyas he readily agreed. He would have several words of encouragement for them. Even if he had to point out a deficiency he would do so without hurting anyone's feelings.

At the same time he was very strict when it came to adjudicating at the expert committee of the Music Academy. If someone claimed a particular composition belonged to Syama Sastry, Rajam would immediately ask with a mischievous smile, "Which Syama Sastry?" Others in the committee would want to verify the antecedents of the composition since the doubt had been raised by none other than Rajam, such was his depth of knowledge.

Rajam should have been honoured appropriately during his lifetime and it is the loss of the music world that it failed to recognise his capability with awards and titles, but it never bothered him. He simply carried on with his work.

Rajam had his own style shorn of any populist gimmicks. Once Dr. V. Raghavan and Rajam were discussing a vivadi raga, and Rajam sang the raga impromptu when Raghavan requested him to do so. It was such a difficult raga and yet he sang it effortlessly.



Vedavalli with Rajam

It is said of truly great people, "*Na bhooto, na bhavishyati*" which means "None like him in the past or the future." It is an apt description of S. Rajam.

R. VEDAVALLI
(Veteran Carnatic musician and guru)

A master all-rounder

The simplest description of S. Rajam would be that he was a low profile genius who excelled in many things. He was like a honeybee going to different gurus and collecting the best they had to offer. His list of gurus reads like a who's who. Not everyone can be this fortunate. More importantly he could assimilate and master everything. Even to accomplish this it would require a lifetime, but Rajam had time for acting, photography, painting, researching into music and studying music related mythology and the history of Carnatic composers. If he could find time for all these activities you can imagine the depth of his devotion and dedication. In cricket you have all-rounders who are very important to their teams. For our south Indian culture Rajam is probably the most important all-rounder.



When I did a programme on Indian rhythms and needed a painting of Bhringi rishi, one of my fellow musicians suggested that Rajam would most definitely know about it. When I asked Rajam he opened a cupboard and came up with the painting of the sage with three legs—just as in mythology. I took it home showed it to my father and incorporated it in my project before returning it to Rajam.

In the Tyagaraja composition *Vidulaku*, the composer pays homage to the gods and sages who engross themselves in the divine nada of music and Bhringi is one of them. So, while teaching that composition to his students, Rajam had visualised the kriti and painted Bhringi along with the other poorvacharyas. This is one more example of Rajam the perfectionist.

Rajam's greatness was the passion with which he pursued his interests without expecting any reward or recognition in return. And he selflessly shared his knowledge with anyone who was willing to learn. Through *vidya danam*, he created a new generation of sishyas. Just as he was

fortunate to learn from some of the great masters his students were fortunate to find a guru like Rajam.

Another important aspect of his teaching that needs to be propagated and preserved is his insistence on suddha swaras. Rajam once observed that the harmonium was essential to help maintain the suddha swaras and its disappearance had robbed us of an important tool in the learning of music. There should be a concerted attempt to revive the harmonium at least as a teaching tool. If Hindustani singers are so strong in suddha swaras it is only because the harmonium is the first accompaniment.

The biggest *prati-upakaram* we can all do to Rajam is to archive his contributions to music, teaching, musical research and painting and remember him on his birth anniversary every year.

UMAYALPURAM K. SIVARAMAN
(Veteran percussionist and guru)

As told to G.C. SHEKHAR

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