

ADYAR K. LAKSHMAN A true sangeetagna

Adyar K. Lakshman, vocalist, nattuvanar, mridangist and erstwhile dancer, is indubitably a sangeetagna, the complete expert in all the aspects of his vocation. Over the years he has received prestigious awards and titles for his popularity and prowess as a natyacharya. Citations for Kalaimamani (Eyal Isai Nataka Manram - 1981), Padma Shri (1989), Sangeet Natak Akademi award (1991), Sangeeta Kala Acharya (Music Academy), Nadhabrahmam (Narada Gana Sabha), adorn the walls of his sitting room. The latest feathers in his well decorated cap are Natya Kalanidhi (ABHAI - 2010) and Natya Kala Sarathy (2011).

77-year old Adyar Lakshman is one of Bharatanatyam's foremost nattuvanar-s with a reputation for providing excellent support. As a member of the orchestral team, he has embellished the recitals of many famous dancers like Rukmini Devi, Kamala, Vyjayantimala Bali, Krishnaveni Lakshmanan, C.V. Chandrasekhar, the Dhananjayans, Yamini Krishnamurti, Sudharani Raghupathy, Lakshmi Viswanathan and the Narasimhacharis.

Adyar K. Lakshman speaks to S. Janaki

He is a prolific teacher. Over 300 students have performed their arangetram under the banner of his dance school Bharata Choodamani in Chennai, which has branches abroad.

Lakshman is also known as “the NRI guru”, as one of the earliest in his field to travel abroad to teach and conduct workshops. His disciples are spread all over the globe and many of them are famous. Notable among them are Kamadev (France), Anandavalli Satchidananda, Chandrabhanu (Australia), Ramli Ibrahim (Malaysia), Padmini Chari, Sudha Srinivasan (U.S.A.), Radha Anjali (Austria), Mavin Khoo (U.K.), Anita-Pritha Ratnam, Vasanthalakshmi Narasimhachari, Bragha Bessell, Jayanthi Subramaniam, and Roja Kannan (India).

Adyar Lakshman was responsible for launching the concept of different guru-s sharing their expertise by teaching items in monthly workshops for ABHAI – the Association of Bharatanatyam Artistes of India. He served as its president for many years.

Adyar Lakshman has introduced a change in the structure of

the nattuvanga talam. He felt that the rope coming through the hole in the centre of the nattuvanga talam “killed its nadam”. So he redesigned it without the cavity or hole in the iron piece held in the left hand (see photo). This is quite popular with many nattuvangam artists.



He has set lyrics to music, composed dance for songs, crafted jati-s, and composed music and dance for items. This creative artist has also directed and choreographed dance sequences for three art films – *Subba Sastri*, *Hamsageethe* and *Ananda Tandavam*.

Early life

I was born in the auspicious month of Margazhi – on 16th December 1933 at Kuppam in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, where father Krishnaraja Rao was a school teacher. He loved music and was fond of performing Harikatha. Mother Godavaribai died when I was only a few months old. We are Tanjore Maharashtrians.

My brother Rama Rao and I often sang together and we were soon spotted by P.D. Doraiswamy who was on the lookout for boys to enroll in Kalakshetra. He heard us singing in a bhajana session and probably saw the hidden spark of musicianship in us. (Chuckles) When Doraiswamy requested my father to send us to study in Kalakshetra, he readily agreed.

Off to Kalakshetra

I went to Kalakshetra in 1944 and had rigorous training in vocal music, Bharatanatyam, mridanga and nattuvangam. Trained in Bharatanatyam by eminent persons like Karaikal Saradamba, Rukmini Devi, Mylapore Gowri Amma, Peria Sarada, and Sarada Hoffman, I learnt Carnatic vocal music from stalwarts like Budalur Krishnamoorthy Sastri, T.K. Ramaswamy Iyengar, Vasudevachar, Tiger Varadachariar and his brother Veenai Krishnamachariar. Tanjore Rajagopala Iyer, Vittal Iyer and Karaikudi Muthu Iyer taught me to play the mridanga. K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai honed my skills in the art of nattuvangam. I was also exposed to Kathakali under doyens like Ambu Panicker and Chandu Panicker. All our teachers were always ready to share their knowledge. I was too young to realise their greatness, but looking back, I understand how fortunate we were. It was such a unique opportunity to learn at the feet of great masters.