

Dr. M. S. Ramani

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# TĀLAVĀDYA SEMINAR-3



Proceedings of  
The Tālavādyā Seminar No. 3 and Allied Papers

*Compiled and Edited by*  
**Bangalore K. Venkataram**

*Published by*  
**PERCUSSIVE ARTS CENTRE (Regd.)**

183, 8th Cross, II Block, Jayanagar,  
Bangalore - 560 011.

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A collection of papers presented during the Talavadya Seminar No. 3 organised by the Percussive Arts Centre, at Madras from the 18th to 20th November, 1993, under joint auspices with Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Madras Kendra. under financial assistance Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, Published by The Percussive Arts Centre, Bangalore.

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## *Editor's Note*

It is quite well known that our Arts Centre has been working exclusively for the promotion of percussive arts and perhaps the only such organisation of this kind in the country. Among the several programmes organised by this Art Centre, **Documentation** of material on percussive instruments not easily available hitherto in exclusive editions receives priority consideration. Generation of data on various aspects - historical, textual, scientific, artistic and other areas has been the primary object of organising these seminars on Talavadyas.

Publications of the proceedings of the Talavadya Seminar - I in 1994 by the Karnataka Sangeetha Nruthya Academy, containing the physics of Indian Drums, Talavadyas of different regions, studies on Leather & Woods, used in Drums, concept of rhythm in Western Music, Role of Talavadyas in the two Indian classical systems, etc., Seminar - 2 in march 1993 organised by our Art Centre which highlighted Khanjari (Kanjira) & Ghata, have been received well. The present edition of the proceedings of the Talavadya Seminar - 3 organised in December 1993 under joint auspices with the Madras Kendra of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, contain data on Dolu (Thavil). Morching, Getbuvadya is expected to be useful to practitioners of these branches of the percussion art and will create an awareness among them. Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, have helped us in organising this Seminar and we are grateful to them.

Our gratitude to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Madras for co-organising this event. I should record our gratitude to all the contributors without whose active participation, this would not have found the light of the day. We are beholden to the noted scholar B.V.K. Sastry for his preface My thanks are due to Kum V. Kalavathy, Sri H.S. Sudhindra & B.S. Purushotham for their efforts in correcting the proofs & especially to Kalavathy for running around the press and carrying out the allied jobs. M/s Pragathi have done an excellent job of printing this highly technical work. I hope readers will benefit by reading this compilation. It is hoped that this publication will be received with interest by all.

*Bangalore K. Venkataram*

## SEMINAR ON THAALAVAADYAAS - 3

The Third Seminar on THAALAVAADYAAS was organised by the PERCUSSIVE ARTS CENTRE, Bangalore under joint auspices with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Madras at the auditorium of the Madras Kendra of the Bhavan at East Mada Street, Mylapore, Madras from the 18th to 20th November, 1993.

The Inaugural Session on Thursday, 18.11.1993. commenced with a poorna kumbha swaagatha to the dignitaries and a veda ghosha by Bramashris Sundar-murthy and Mayurm K. Viswanatha Sastry. S. Shankar of Bangalore rendered 'Sogasuga Mrudanga thaalamu' of Thyagaraja in Sriranjani melodiously for prayer and gave a delightful start. Bangalore K. Venkataram, Executive Director of the Art Centre in his welcome speech cum report, explained the activities of the Centre like Awards to senior percussionists and senior vidwans, organising special Lectures, Symposia, Seminars, Centenaries, publishing monographs on topics related to Taala and Laya etc. A brief on the earlier two seminars on Thaalavaadyaas was also presented. This Seminar, the third of its kind, Venkataram observed, was to highlight the instruments Tavil (Dolu), Morching and Gethuvaadya. The purpose has been to generate authentic data on these for publication and provide material for posterity for possible Development and Research.

Violin maestro, Kunnakkudi R. Vaidyanathan, Chairman, Tamilnadu Iyal Isai Nataka Mandram, in his scholarly Inaugural address referred to the all-pervasive aspects of Laya, prevalent every where in the Universe like Chandra gathi, Suryagathi, Nakshathra gathi and observed that any minute change in this results in flood, gale and thunder and so on. Right from the breathing of Man, tempo is prevalent even in the normal speaking of persons. He referred to 'sol' 'shabda' in Chandas and recalled an interesting instance of the great poet Kannadasan composing for the Thavil Valayapatti's line rendition as mnemonics. Kunnakkudi made specific reference to the work of the Art Centre in recognising the necessity of remembering great Laya wizards like Palghat Mani and Palani Subramanya Pillai, for the first time and honouring percussion artists. Percussive Arts Centre has been the First and only such organisation working exclusively for the promotion of the interests of percussive arts, in the music field itself. He referred to the Thavil play while nagaswara alapana and the Laya in ragaalapana. In such great service to the field of Laya, it is not only the public, but even the Vidwans, who should support and assist the Centre by their co-operation and active involvement.

Sangeetha Kalarathna R.K. Srikantan in his Presidential address noted the points raised by Kunnakkudi and stressed the necessity of adequate support from public, Artists, Government and other agencies for such efforts in documenting data on percussions. After a delightful nagaswara recital by Bangalore M. Kodandaraman with Thavil by Thanjavur T.R. Govindarajan, a paper on Needamangalam Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, the Thavil wizard, whose birth centenary was ob-

served was read by Bangalore K. Venkataram. In his paper he stated that the very term 'Thavilkaarar' in Tamilnadu indicated none but him. It was Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer who said 'It is enough to simply say Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. This single word would speak the whole history of Thavil.' A Highly educative Dolu (Thavil) display by Thanjavur T.R. Govindarajan was highlighted by the narration of the noted musicologist. B.M. Sundaram of Pondicherry. Reference was made to the starting of Thavil play with the syllable 'Thom' and the very 'first phase would end with a gathibheda, thus introducing the Layavishaya even during the first spell of his play. It was explained how the thavil is the first and foremost instrument to portray the beauties of Laya vyavahaara and rightly called the Rajavaadya by our ancestors.

On Friday, 19.11.93, a paper was presented by Dr. N. Somanathan of the Central Leather Research Institute, Bio-physics Lab, Madras on studies on Thavil which was noteworthy for the highly sophisticated study and the analysis on scientific lines of the aspects of Skins and Leathers used. Another paper was presented by B. Rajasekhar on behalf of his father Bangalore L. Bhimachar, a veteran morching player, on 'Morching'. He referred to the tribals of Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Hill tribes of Deccan using this instrument from time immemorial. References to this in ancient text were also cited. A recital of Morching-tarang was the highlight wherein L. Bhimachar, B. Rajasekhar and B. Bhagyalakshmi chose Mohana for their display. A demonstration of the manufacture of Dolu by the veteran manufacturer Thiruvaiyaru Govindaraja Pillai with narrations by B.M. Sundaram marked the highly developed system of the manufacture of the instrument in several stages from the Katta, Valais, Leather parchments, Connecting straps, Modiram, Valayam, Venaiyam, Padam etc. were demonstrated.

Avvudaiyarkoil H. Subramanyam presented a paper on Gethuvaadya on Saturday, 20.11.1993 tracing the advent and history of this rare and disappearing instrument. He explained the mechanism and functioning of the instrument and then demonstrated the play accompanying a Vocal recital of S.Shankar. Mythical and scriptural reference were also stated. B.M. Sundaram presented a paper on 'Some eminent Laya Vaadyakaaraas' referring to several instrumentalists in Dolu, Morching and Gethu. The concluding session was an Open House discussion participated by Dr. N. Ramanathan, R. Vedavalli, K.S. Kalidas, Umayalapuram Sivaraman, B.M. Sundaram and Bangalore K. Venkataram. Several technical problems were discussed and an interesting dialogue between the participants brought out ideas and theories. R.K. Srikantan wound up the Seminar with a brief valedictory address.

The Seminar was subsidised by Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi and Karnataka Sangeetha Nruthya Academy, Bangalore.



## NEEDAMANGALAM MEENAKSHISUNDARAM PILLAI

*Bangalore K. Venkataram*

Meenakshi sundaram Pillai was a celebrity in the art of Taval, whose Charisma still pervades the field. A non-pareil, he secured the greatest status and name to that instrument by his incompatible virtuosity, having diligently laboured for a number of years. The very term "Tavilkarar" (in Tamil) indicated none but him. He had accompanied almost all the front-ranking Nagaswara Vidwans, who are greatly venerated even this day. Those who have had the fortune of listening to his playing explain that even the '*one-thousand tongued*' Adiscsha could not do justice in portraying his merits vividly. It was Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer who said, " It is enough to simply say Meenakshisundaram Pillai. This single word would speak the whole history of Taval."

Meenakshisundaram was born at Needamangalam on 3.9.1894 as the son of Subramaniam and Deivayanai Ammal. He was the only child. The mother passed away when Meenakshisundaram was barely 27 days old. His maternal aunt, Kamalammal, reared the infant and brought him up.

When the kid was four, maternal uncle Singaram Pillai started lessons in Taval, as was the custom of the family. As is known, for about six generations of this family, almost all the male members were only Taval players; none took up Nagasavaram. The assiduous Meenakshisundaram would play immediately, whatever taught, with utmost perfection. His retentive memory, precise laya gnaana and powerful eyes attracted his eldest maternal uncle, Govinda Pillai, a great Taval Vidwan of repute, who took up his nephew, under his own care. Govinda Pillai was an asthana vidwan of Mysore.

When he attained his ninth year, Meenakshisundaram turned out to be a good Taval player and was first engaged by Needamangalam Singaram Pillai, a Nagasavaram artiste. In 1904, he joined the troupe of Mannargudi Narayanaswami Pillai, a very talented Nagaswara Vidwan (he was the cousin of Konakol Pakkiri Pillai). Two years passed and Meenakshisundaram Pillai travelled in all the surrounding areas.

Nagaswara 'Mahavidwan', Nagapattanam Venugopala Pillai was in the look out for a suitable Taval accompanist. Recommended by his brother in law (cum disciple) Kottur Soundraraja Pillai, Meenakshisundaram was contacted. He, carrying his instrument on the head, walked the distance of twelve kilometers and reached Kottur. The very sight of Meenakshisundaram might have perhaps revelled a lot in the mind of the prescient Venugopala Pillai. He simply said, " Yes!

Here is my man," and so, Meenakshisundaram started to Nagapattanam. For about eleven years, he served as a Taval accompanist; though, in fact, that was his real training period. Venugopala Pillai, who excelled in 'Laya Vyavahara' coached the young Meenakshisundaram in all the intricate aspects of laya. Whenever Pillai had no performances, Meenakshisundaram, with his permission, would go to play for the legendary nagaswaram maestro, Mannargudi China Pakkiri Pillai. The tenure in Nagapattanam and later, provided Meenakshisundaram ample opportunities to play with or to listen to the playing of great stalwarts such as Srivanchiyam Govinda Pillai, Vazhuvoor Muthuveer Pillai, Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai, Ammapet Pakkiri Pillai and so on, by which, he made abnormal progress in his own playing.

When Venugopala Pillai passed away in 1917, Meenakshisundaram Pillai was taken in by the Pallavi exponent, Semponnarkovil Ramaswami Pillai. Then he took part with Nagore Subbaya Pillai, Madurai Ponnuswami Pillai, Woriur Gopalaswami Pillai and such others. By that time, his fame was accrescent.

Pasupatikovil Veerabhadra Pillai, a reputed Taval Asthana Vidwan of Mysore gave his daughter, Nagammal to Meenakshisundaram. When the son in law is unmatched in status and accomplishments, how could Veerabhadra Pillai get one, who could be, at least, to some extent, fit to become a 'Co-brother' of Meenakshisundaram and hence, he gave his second daughter, Rajammal also to Meenakshisundaram as wife.

After having participated in various mela troupes, Meenakshisundaram Pillai become, in the final phase, the stock accompanist to Tiruvuzhimizhalai brothers and stayed for about 26 years. Rasikas would exclaim always that Pillai was only a 'third nagaswaram' - so would he play on the Taval. He was a real accompanist, in the purest sense of the term. The beauty and pace of the song rendered on the nagaswara would always be enriched and embellished by Meenakshisundaram pillai. But the team didn't last long. Some misunderstanding crept in to make Pillai leave the troupe and also to decide that he would no longer be in any one troupe and those who want his services have to engage him separately. Thus, he became the first 'Special Taval Vidwan'. Pillai used to say, "Only that player who has served for many years in many troupes, as a permanent accompanist, could later become, by age, experience and skill, a special Taval artiste, not everyone." But, that is not the case in the present times, since gimmerocks are a plenty. It is needless to say that the glory of Pillai reached the pinnacles. It was a steady and gradual process. Many a time, he would say, "this is bard earned by sweat of blood."

The awards and titles Meenakshisundaram Pillai got are uncountable. 'Abbinava Nandeesa', 'Patahavadya Praveena', 'Taval Praveena', 'Akhila Indiya Taval Chakravarthi' are some among his titles.

He was more scary to other Taval artists. Even very talented artists would boggle, because, on myriomous occasions, they have experienced the imbroglio, caused by him, while playing. His jatis would be tantalizing and his 'Laya Vinyasa' on the whole, would be a teaser. It was only he who led the Laya Vinyasa and was also choosy in allowing other players to take part with him. By nature, he would not allow any one to surpass him in playing. His playing was adored as peremptory by his colleagues. Till date, none equaled him in playing, not to speak about excelling him. The single syllable 'Nam' he played in a unique manner, which could not be found among others. Likewise, 'Nadaicchol' was his sole treasure, but, gone with him. He never minded any sort of tedium while playing the whole night in the processions. When once he took the Taval on his shoulders, he never got it out, till the end of the performance. The exception was only when the nagaswara troupe had no work, for some time, in the midst of the programme. He was never aberrant and revered the old masters as well as his senior contemporaries. Integrity was his hall mark, both in profession and life. If he accepted an engagement, he would not miss it, even if a more handsome remuneration was offered for another engagement on the same day. Punctuality is yet another name for Meenakshisundaram pillai. Never in his career, he caused anxiety to the organisers about his arrival and would present himself, well in advance.

He considered Vazhuvoor Muthuveer Pillai as his mentor. At various times, he had learnt Jatis and many intricate rhythmic passages from konakol pakkiri Pillai, whom, also he held in great reverence.

'Vallinam-mellinam' was the speciality in Pillai's playing besides mathematical brain and abominable imagination. Surgical precision in Laya, was inborn in him.

He was a 'bhakta' of Mahatma Gandhi and, whenever time permitted, he would never fail to spin in the 'charka'. He always wore khadi and when Gandhiji was shot dead, he didn't take any food for three whole days, as a mark of mourning, while all the time, shedding tears. he said, "I don't know how to, but, when the Mahatma is no more, why should I be here?". He didn't live long.

Above all, he was very fond of cows. Three or fours of them would always be in his cattleshed. Whenever he returned after concert tours, he would straight away walk to the backyard, tenderly speak to those 'speechless' animals, ask his disciples whether the cows were fed in time and then only come to his own quarters. Even before breathing his last he went, at 2.30 am. to the cattleshed, spoke to them and retired to bed, not to wake up. His last dialogue was only with the cows.

Soundravalli (Husband: Nagaswara Vidwan Soorganar-kovil Narayanaswami Pillai), Mangalambal (Tiruppanandal Tangappa Pillai), Jayalakshmi

(Natchiyarkovil Tavil Vidwan, Raghava Pillai), Deivayanai (Needamangalam Venkatarama Pillai) and Vembu (Nagaswara Vidwan, Tiruvuzhimizhalai Govindaraja Pillai), being Meenakshisundaram Pillai's daughters, his eldest son, Shanmukhavadivel, become an outstanding Tavil vidwan. Some would say that the son was far ahead of the father. Pillai's younger son, Sundaram, is a musicologist.

Renukujambal, grand-daughter, through Pillai's eldest daughter got married to Shanmukhavadivel. In fact, Pillai was very reluctant to give his consent for this alliance, but compulsion from some close relatives made him helpless. He asked them, "Don't you know, a girl born in the star, moola, would only make her mother inlaw, a widow?... So, all of you don't want me to live anymore. Okay." He was sure that he won't live more and settled his property among his sons and daughters. The wedding of Shanmukhavadivel took place on 12.2.1949. The shining stars in the sky of carnatic music were all there, some to perform, others to participate in the festivities. The next early morning (13.2.1949), Meenakshisundaram Pillai attained eternity, during his sleep. The palanquim specially designed and decorated to take around the new couple in procession, carried Pillai's body to the funeral ground.

In his whole career, Meenakshisundaram pillai had played only for Vidwans of Isaivellala community and also only to nagaswaram. He proved that he could play in any troupe (however complicated the nagaswaram playing may be) and also in any complex tala. To render Laya Vinyasa, in terse Chhanda talas of Tiruppugazh was 'fruit in milk' to him.

Meenakshisundaram Pillai's charisma will last for ever. Charles C., Colton rightly said,

"Contemporaries appreciate the man rather than the merit, but posterity will regard the merit rather than the man".

\* \* \* \*

## TAVIL

*B.M. Sundaram*

The musical System of South India has a long antiquity. When compared to other systems of music around the globe, the uniqueness of South Indian music is quite obvious. Nowhere else one could find the mathematical manipulations of laya, as it is in our music. Pallavi or svaraprastara are buildings constructed upon the edifice of this mathematical intricacies of Laya. The blending of mathematics and melody is the crest Jewel of our musical system. By giving predominance to such intricate mathematical combinations and by serving as the beacon light for other percussive instruments, it is the TAVIL a membranophonous instrument that takes the just place in securing credit and greatness to our music, right from early times. Though, this instrument is also used to-day as an accompaniment to Vocal or instrumental music, formerly, why, even upto about thirty years ago, it maintained a time-honoured tradition to be the accompaniment, only to nagaswaram.

The Percussive Arts Centre, Bangalore is really doing a great service to these arts and now, it is conducting a worthy seminar here by way of widening its services across its own geographical boundaries. We, the citizens of Tamilnadu, extend our hearty thanks to the Centre, for this noble gesture.

To day, We have Thanjavur Sri. T.R. Govindarajan, an young but a very talented and prominent Tavil artiste, to present some traditional forms, by way of assisting me.

Since Tavil does not possess the pitch to great extent, as other percussions like the mrudangam do, the Tavil artist necessarily has to introduce 'mathematics', even at the commencement. Always the Tavil play started with the syllable 'Tom.' The very first person, called Pillayar Patam' itself commences with 'Tom'- 'Tom Tom Takā' etc.. This first Syllable 'Tom' begins before the tala starts i.e. in Vishma graha and the very first phrase begun by the artist is mostly ended with a 'Gatibheda'. (Let's listen: Demonstration)

Thus, a Tavil artiste introduces a 'Laya Vishesha (Vishama Graha & Gatibheda) even during the first spell of his playing.

All the percussives that take part in a classical music concert, begin only after the song is actually commenced. But only in a nagaswara performance, the sound of even the main instrument- Nagaswara-starts only after a Tavil play. This is unique in this instrument. Further, one more remarkable thing is there. All the syllables for Tavil are sounded only in the same place, as taught, during the early

practising sessions, even where they are executed in any phrase and even at an incredible speed. To explain it further, let's take the mrudaugam, for instance. 'Ta' is taught to be produced on the middle portion of the 'Toppi', whereas, during the execution of faran syllables, the same 'Ta' is sounded on the Valandalai also. This is not the case in the Taval. 'Ta' or 'Tom' or 'ki'- Whatever be the syllable, it is produced always only at the same place, as taught in the initial stages.

All these subscribe to the fact that Taval is the first and foremost instrument to come up to portray the beauties of 'Laya Vyavahara'. and rightly called by our ancestors as the 'Raja Vadya'.

When once a Taval player, commences, he has no rest till the end of the performance, unless there is some short interval. Even during the Raga alapana on a Nagaswaram, he goes on playing proper solfa phrases, that would suit the kalapramana of the raga. This is called 'Anusarippigai'. By this term, we are given to understand that Taval is played with such a fitting 'follow up' and by no way, marring the playing of Nagaswaram, at any stage.

In the midst of the Raga Alapana or at its end, the nagaswara artist stops at a particular note for a greater length of time and the Taval player improvises rhythmic passages - brocaded with 'rolling syllables' (Uruttu chorkal) and gives rest to the main artist. This is called 'manodharma,' which indicates that this part is played out of pure imagination.

During the Laya Vinayasa on the Taval, a tradition is maintained. Whereas in other music concerts, Laya Vinayasa is done only after a Kriti or Pallavi rendition, it may either be the same case or at the end of a lengthy raga alapana in a Nagaswara performance. If the Laya Vinayasa is played in a Raga alapana, it will be ended only with the 'Mohara' and no 'Muktayi'. 'Muktayi' should be played only when the Laya Vinayasa is presented after a kriti or Pallavi, Now, let us listen to a 'Mohara' (Demonstration).

Playing 'Korvais' excessively has become the custom of the present day. But, in earlier days, say until three decades ago, only 'Jatis' were played on the Taval, even during the Laya Vinyasam. We must bear in mind, that Laya Vinyasam on the Taval was not in existence about half a century ago. The 'manodharma' would be played for about 4 or 5 minutes, ending with a mohara. Only that was the Laya Vinyasa, of those days. 'Jatis' involve 'Vallinam and mellinam' (hard and soft strokes), mostly ending with a 'Kitataka-tarikitatom.' Whereas a 'muktayi' (now called as 'Tadiginattom' or 'Korvai' that follows a mohara) ends with only 'Tadiginattom,' a jati would necessarily end with a 'Kitatatarikitatom,' of course, with the exception in few small jatis. Let's now listen to one or two jatis.

1. Chaturasra Triputa: Dhee ttam tam- dhi dhi-ttam taka."
2. Chaturasra Triputa: Tatu-Tarikita-Tarikita-Kitataki....
3. Chaturasra (Tisra Gati)-Kirra Tom
4. Chaturasra (Tisra Gati)-Tattari-Kirrakitataka...

Thus, we have hundreds of such jatis in all the 35 talas. The jatis for 108 talas are also there, but not now in use, like the very talas themselves.

Nagasvaram and Tavil came into existence and are meant only for temple rituals. A musical form called 'mallari', a special piece exclusively for Nagasvaram, is played, at the time of the deity's procession. At such times, before the commencement of the mallari or even the raga 'Gambheera Nata', 'Alarippu' is played on the Tavil. Here also the playing of Tavil precedes that of the Nagasvaram. As soon as the drone is sounded, the Tavil artiste begins to play in Khanda gati-having five aksharas. The usage Panchakashara, Panchaboota, Panchakrutya, Panchasakti, Panchaverna, Pancha mahasada and so on are quite common. Lord Siva is said to have five faces. Likewise, according to Agamic tenets, all activities connected with God are to commence with representation of five units. Even in the Bhajana tradition, the today a mangalam - invocation-is set in khanda gati only. On the basis of this, 'Alarippu' in khanda gati is played on the Tavil.

The original name for 'Alarippu' is 'melaprapti'. This had a place in the Bharatanatya performances of yester years and is even today found in the Yakshaganas of Karnataka, the veedhi Bhagavatha of Andhra Pradesh and the Bhagavata mela of Melattur. There are some lessons of 'Alarippu', meant for Tavil, based on the four important syllables- Ta-Dhi-Tom and Nam. This is called 'Nāngukai Patam'-lessons for the four hands. Here, the word 'hands' actually means the main syllables. A specimen of 'Alarippu' lesson: Takkudhum - Kitakudhum... This is only a lesson. Playing different Alarippus, depends on the imaginative skill and pleasure of the Tavil player.

My father (Sri Needamangalam Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai) used to play many and I would like to present one here. (Demonstration)

Another important form in playing the Tavil is 'Nadaicchol.' It is usually played when the procession is on the move and when only one or more Tavils engage in playing, one after the other. Playing 'Nadaicchol' is completely gone into oblivion. I am proud to say that my father excelled in this and many living veterans used to comment that playing 'Nadaicchol' had completely disappeared after him. But I must, at the same time, admit, that after my father, the only other Tavil artiste who excelled in this aspect was Kattumannarkudi Tirunarayana Pillai. It is

nothing difficult to play. But, the Vallinam and Mellinum employed would be such, that others would dread to enter into it. Today, when most of the popular Taval artists have no opportunity to walk and play in any procession, how could we expect 'Nadaicchol' from them? Specimens of 'Nadaicchol' playing:- (Demonstration)

The Laya Vinyasam is the most important item in a Nagasvara performance. From the day it was introduced, the Taval artistes adhere to an important tradition. Laya Vinyasam may follow a Swara.

Similarly in the way it is done in other music concerts prastara in a Kruti or Pallavi or sometimes at the end of a raga - alapana. The tradition is that, if the Laya Vinyasam is done in a raga - alapana, it will be ended only with a mohara - no muktayi. On the other hand, if it is done after Swaraprastara, muktayi would follow the mohara, to the exact 'graha' - eduppu.

Such a hoary tradition is honoured and practiced by the Taval artistes. All the percussion maestros, in general, never use a paper and pen on the stage to work out their calculations. Whether multiplication and addition or division and subtraction, every calculation is done on their mental slates, in a spur of a moment. Among them, the category of Taval player, which has lesser or absolutely no formal education, consists of experts in mathematical intricacies pertaining to the sphere of laya. They actually play in a 'booth of fire' and most deservedly, they could be equated to 'computers'. Their meritorious art, with its pristine pure tradition of playing, has been well protected, preserved and developed, for the benefit of humanity. We are happy there are many Taval artistes, even today, who do not step down the path of tradition, properly and strongly laid down by their predecessors. To the great masters of yester-years we bow our heads and cherish their memory. I thank Sri. T.R. Govindarajan, Taval vidwan, for kindly spacing his time to come over here and demonstrate some items. I, on his behalf and on my own thank the Percussive Arts Centre, Bangalore, for giving this fine opportunity and our thanks to all of you.



## TAVIL - MANUFACTURING METHOD.

*B.M. Sundaram*

**KATTAL:** The barrel shaped wooden piece is called 'Tavil Kattai.' Both ends of it are open. Sandalwood, Jackwood, Mango, Nuna (morinda Tingtoria), Rosewood, margota and the babool wood have been prescribed by the texts for making this. Only Jackwood is used in the present times. There are two varieties: Timiri and Bari, Just like the usage in the nagasvaram. Timiri is shorter in length and circumference than the Bari variety. The measurements of the present day Tavil are:

Length or Height	-	15.75 inches
Circumference of the Centre	-	11.00 inches
Radius of the mouth - Valandalai	-	8.25"
Toppi	-	8.12"
Thickness - Central position	-	1"
mouth	-	1/8".

These are manufactured by carpentars, trained specially in this craft. Jaffna in Ceylon and Tiruvavaduturai in Tamilnadu are famous for such craftsmen.

**VALAIS:** The leather parchments of both the sides in a Tavil are inserted on circular rings, called 'Valais.' They have to be made with meticulous care and extreme perfection, otherwise the skin attached to them would easily tear off. Good bamboo sticks are selected and are broken into lengthy, but, thin splinters and immersed in the water, for about two days. Then they are taken out and coiled in a coconut tree. Two days later, they are untied from the tree and put on a brass cauldron, full of water. Also the bitter leaves of noechi and Adatoda (Adatoda Vasica) are added in the water and boiled for a minimum duration of five hours. After this the bamboo splinters are wound, in seven layers of circular round, on rings of iron, already made to suit the required size and gum made out of Tamarind seeds is fully pasted on them. Sometime later, the bamboo strips are detached from the iron rings and small ligaments of leather called 'Suraivar' are wound over them tightly and once again the gum is fully coated. When they are dried in hot sun, they are ready for use. Thiruvaiyaru and particularly this Govindaraja Pillai and his brother are the best makers.

**Leather Parchments:** The leather portion at both ends of the Tavil give rise to the sound. These are generally called 'Tattugal' among the Tavil players and not 'moottugal' as termed by those in the field of mrudangam. Generally, female goat's skin is to be used, for the Valantalai and male goat's skin or calf's skin, for Toppi. But, at present, that is, since three or four years, only calf's skin is used for the Valantalai, for it produces more voluminous sound.

The hide is pulled out of the animal and soaked in water. Then it is spread on the floor fully elongated with its corners nailed. When it becomes dry, the hair is removed, with the help of ash and then it is cut to the required measurement. These leather pieces are attached to the Valais - the rings made out of bamboo - and tightened with paste of the tamarind seeds. Another layer of the same hide is used for 'Vettu Thattu'. Then eleven small holes are made on the skin - which are called 'Kangal' (eyes) - to enable the leather straps to be inserted.

**Connecting straps:** Both sides of the Tavil - the Tattus are placed on the wooden barrel and connected and strongly tightened with the help of leather thongs made out of buffalo's skin. But using this is now obsolete, for, small iron straps are placed on the instrument with screws and nuts. The nuts are tightened or loosened, according to the requirement.

**Modira Valayam:** A small brass ring is used to tie the leather strap. But after the advent of screws and nuts, this has fallen into disuse.

**Vendaiyam:** A circular bronze ring is used to join the instrument with a thick cotton ribbon, called 'Nada', which helps to hang the instrument on the shoulders. I think, this is also not used to day.

**Padam:** Fortunately, this is still in currency. Inside the leather portion of the Toppi and in its centre, a black coloured pastels fixed, the size being that of a one rupee coin. This is called 'Padam.' Only due to this application, the Toppi produces soft and tender sounds. You might have noticed a small image of Nandikesvara in front of Siva shrines. The oil anointed on that, once in a way, becomes, in due course dry. This balm is scrapped from that image for grinding it in a mortar with the pestle. By hard pounding for a longer time, the oil substance, oozes out slowly and this wet substance is collected and applied as 'Padam.' How befitting it is that the Tavil players use this balm connected from Nandikesvara.

**Stick:** The stick used for playing on the Toppi, was made with twings of the Partia (Thespesia Papulnia) tree. But, for the past few decades, only barks from the Tiruvasi tree is in use, because of its strong utility and durability.

In a Nagasvara concert, if the read called 'Seavali' is not in order, it could be then and there, changed. A mrudangam which may, at times, sound out of pitch, could be rectified, on the platform, by knocking at the appropriate 'eye'. Even if one or two such eyes are out of tune, the rest of the concert could be managed, at least with a 'single eye', that sounds perfect. But, this is not possible in Taval. Replacing the 'moothus' in the midst of a performance could never be thought of. The sound of the Valandalai and the Toppi should be in perfect consonance. The hides covering both sides of the Taval are prone to change with the effect of heat or coolness of the environment. When the parchments are fixed on the wooden barrel, the skin on either side may easily tear off, if even a minute contrasity is there. It won't be an exaggeration, if I say, the instrument favouring the artiste on the stage fully depends on the grace of God. The physical concept of the instrument is something different, but the perfect nada, meant to come out it without even a minimal disturbance, can be had only due to Divine Grace.

There is a common Sentiment to attach Divinity to Taval, though, every musical instrument is also Divine. But, Divinity is ascribed much more to the Taval. One may consider this is false superstition. Nobody is allowed to come near when the leather parchments are fixed on the Taval, none would be allowed to stand in the place with one leg on the floor and the other on the wall.

One could clearly witness the skin tearing off, if anybody near is cross-legged or if someone takes a 'fillip' in the fingers, not to speak about the ladies who approach. The instrument is very sensitive and purity and sanctity are more attached. That's why, the cover for this instrument is made out of saffron cloth, which represents fire and which is meant for sanyasins, who are believed to be the abode of purity and sanctity.

## MORCHING

*L. Bhimachar*

Morching is a percussive instrument. This is one of the accompanying percussive instruments in Carnatic music.

It is said to have come to the concert dias in the beginning of this century.

**MORCHING** is a small instrument resembling a Conch ' (Shanka) and hence got the name **MUKHASANKHA** and later came to be called '**MORSANGU**', '**MORCHING**', '**MORSING**', '**MORCHING**' and so on.

It is difficult and risky to handle this instrument. Hence the number of **MORCHANG** artist's are very minimal.

Tribals of Himachal Pradesh, Assam and the hill tribes of Deccan have been using this instrument from time immemorial. The Chenchu tribes of Deccan use similar instrument made with small bamboo splice which they call as '**TONDARAMMA**'.

Mummadi Chikka Bhoopala has mentioned about this instrument in his '**ABHINAVA BHARATA SARA SAMGRAHA**'. Vidya Vilasa Pandita, in his '**VADYA PRAKASA**' has mentioned this instrument as a sushira Vadya (wind instrument).

This instrument consists of a frame of metal in horse-shoe shape, with the two ends extended into parallel branches; between them metal tongue vibrates freely when set in motion by a stroke of the finger. This instrument is placed between the front teeth as to give the metal tongue unrestricted movement and the performer is able to produce various notes by altering the size of the cavity of the mouth. A skilled performer is able to play all the jati combinations with accuracy.

In our country usually the outer frame is made up of mild-steel and the tongue is made up of carbon-steel. The frame work of the morching may be of any metal, but the tongue must be of carbon -steel only because of its nature of having vibrating tension. The high tension in the tongue and high vibration while playing the morching may cause the tongue to break. Morching for different srutis are available. The pitch of the morching can be lowered to a little extent up to one pitch by loading bee -wax at the plucking end.

The youth of Israel, in 19th century, used to sound this instrument during night which is said to have attracted young girls who were fascinated by it and have lost their virginity. Therefore, the Government banned playing the instrument. Even in South India, there was a superstitious belief that Mohini would come if the Morching is played.

Hebrews (Jews) were once experts in producing a variety of pleasing sounds with this instrument. That is why it is still called the '**JEW'S HARP**'. The Jew's Harp is found in Europe, Eastern Asia and Occania. Here both frame and tongue are generally made of wood, tongue sometimes of metal. Whereas in Europe, the tongue is provided with an upturned end for plucking, in the primitive oriental types it is set in motion by a jerking string.

In China it is called '**K'ou chin**' meaning Mouth Harp. Buddhist monks practised on this instrument and took it to the Eastern Countries. A Buddhist work '**EKOTTARAGA SUKTA**' describes about Ananda, a monk, who would sound this instrument as soon as he entered the classroom to indicate that the class would commence then. During the 4th Century AD Sui Dynasty ruled the North Western China. India sent a multitude of presents to a king, among which 23 musical instruments also found a place. Morching was one among the 23.

No doubt at some remote period the instrument was brought into Europe from Asia. In an ancient grave in Norway a Jew's harp of copper finely gilt was discovered. Seeing that vibrating tongues of wood or metal are used in this popular and widely spread **zanza** of Africa, it is somewhat strange that the Jew's harp is unknown to the primitive tribes of that continent. It is also absent among the American Indians.

We will now have a look at the sound producing properties of this instrument.

Sir Charles Wheatstone, who studied the action of the free vibrating reeds, and in 1829 invented the concertina, considered that the alteration of the cavity or resonance chamber of the mouth produced harmonics on the prime or fundamental note in their regular series as on the trumpet or violin. But the present accepted theory is that the prime note is a composite sound made up of a wide range of harmonics and that these are reinforced and brought into prominence as the resonant chamber of the mouth is adopted in proper relation to them.

Victor Mahillon, on experimenting with the Jew's harp, found that by forming the mouth as for the pronunciation in succession of the French vowels '**EIOU OU**' the twelfth from the prime and the intervals of the major chord above, were isolated in turn and reinforced. Like the natural trumpet the instrument suffers from the inevitable gaps in the ordinary diatonic scale and great virtuosi on the Jew's harp, such as Koch, Scheibler, Eulenstein and others, used several instruments of different sizes and therefore obtained a series of harmonics of different pitch in order to complete its scale.

In 1816, Scheibler produced an instrument of this class called '**AURA**', which was furnished with 10 vibrating tongues arranged in sections of five, one for each

hand. And according to another account, he used as many as 20 fixed on a disc with the tongues diverging from the centre. It is said that the aura produced a magic effect in the concert room owing to the power of expression it possessed. In Eastern specimens two or three tongues are not infrequently found upon the same frame.

Adichapuram Sitarama Iyer may be said to be the person responsible for introducing this instrument on the concert stage. He had accompanied Komerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Kancheepuram Naina Pillai and many other such stalwarts. The greatest among the morching artistes was Mannargudi Natesha Pillai.

Palghat Sachidanandam Iyer, Nettakudi Harihara Sharma, Madras R.V. Pakkiriswami, Pudukottai S. Mahadevan, Mayuram Rajaraman and many others are morching artists. Vaiyapuri Devar was a noted Mridangam player in Old Mysore who would very occasionally play morching. Tanjavur Sami Achari was an expert in making this instrument. Tumkur Veerabhadrachar of Mysore also made morchings of different types and sizes. Morchings are now made in Rajapalayam in Tamil Nadu.

Apart from Karnatik music concerts, morching, is used extensively in background music in movies.

To motivate more artistes to take up playing morching the organisers and the Chief performers or the main artists of Karnatik music should have this wonderful percussion instrument in all their concerts. It is only then that this instrument will be more popular.

I thank Sri. Bangalore K. Venkataram of Percussive Arts Centre for providing me the opportunity to present this paper. I also thank Sri. B.M. Sundaram of Pondicherry to have provided important information regarding this paper.

## GETHU VADHYAM (JHALLARI)

*Avvudaiyarkoil H. Subramanyam*

Salutations to all the scholarly members of this audience:

God's Grace be praised, for bringing me up before this august audience, this special day ... and may that Divine Grace guide me further, in presenting the rare instrument **GETHU VADHYAM** in fitting manner.

About a decade back, i.e., in May'83 to be particular, the same organisers, then known as **PALGHAT MANIYER MEMORIAL ART CENTER, BANGALORE**, put me on stage at Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore, in the same context of presenting Gethu Vadhyam to the audience there. At that time, I gave a written article too - which was published in parts, in a souvenir they had brought up on the occasion. My appeal then was to project, popularise and further exploit this unique instrument, bequeathed to us by our forefathers. Sometime later, I came to know that my revered friend, Shri Bangalore Venkataram had made some arrangements to make a new instrument of Gethu there at Bangalore and to try it out in ensembles and I was very obviously elated over that. However, later developments and improvements on that project of his had not been known. Presuming a sort of *status quo* in the context, I am rather adapting an identical position here too this day. Also, the venue and visitors being different, it would also be in fitness of things, if I do so ... so that, the instrument would be let known to the Rasikas in its entirety for their individual assessment and appraisal. There is however a latent bit of lament left in me, in that during the past ten years, the impact could not be palpable ... and it conveys that either my efforts have not been adequate or that the euphoric acclaim evidenced has been rather momentary and not momentuous. Anyway, let us go to the topic now:

Jhallari - as Gethu Vadhyam has been known in ancient days - is one of the eighteen codified instruments (Ashta Dasa Vadhyams). In mythical lore, sage Augustiar is said to have been a master of this instrument and he is said to have used this instrument - for music renditions during his puja timings. 'Kumara Thanthram', a ritualistic manual on Sri Subrahmanya Upasana, contains reference on this instrument. Even Sri Subrahmanya Sahasranamam, as in vogue today, does contain a salutation as: 'Jhallari Vadhya Supriyaya Namaha'. The famous Dwijavanthi Krithi of Sri Muthuswami Dikshithar, 'Akilandeswarim Rakshamam..' refers to this instrument as one of the choicest for Srimath Ambika, viz., " .... Jhalli Madhdhahala Jarjara Vadhya Rasike ....". According to our elders, Jhallari being Gethu as aforesaid, Jarjari refers to the present - day Ganjira, in its old form or version. The very coinage of the two names, Jhallari & Jarjari, is rather enematopoeic in nature, in the very names when pronounced conveying the very way the respective instruments would sound when played.

While mythical or scriptural references are thus available, it is a pity indeed that not much is known of artistes of the past years in the context of this instrument. The earliest available archival records are from Ramanathapuram Samasthanam. Incidentally, it has been this noble dynasty of the Sethupathis that has established a traditional Sarvamanya Kainkaryam in the famous Ambigai Sannidhi (Sri Yogambigai Sannidhanam) of Avudayarkoil Temple. While the origin of the Kainkaryam - i.e., where the Sarvamanyam has been arranged - is not known for certain, later references pointing to the traditional kainkaryam from the past are traceable - and the earliest of such "later references" dates back to the year 1651.

According to a judgment delivered in a Civil case in the years 1951-53 in the Court of the District Munsiff, Pattukkottai, certain archival references from such Ramnad Samasthanam Records have been quoted extensively on examination. With date as 1651 - Chithri 23 Sowmya -, a Pair has been named as Kuppayya & Subbayya Bhagavathars, in the context of the Yogambigai Sannadhi Kainkaryam. A later reference of 1803 speaks of one Krishna Bhagavathar - also referred sometimes as Veenai Kiruttina Bhagavathar. Still later mention of 1906-07 cites one Subbarama Iyer and one Seethara Iyer. The last mentioned Seethara Iyer is my grandfather - i.e., father of famous Avudayarkoil Harihara Bhagavathar ..... my revered father and guru. All these names being in the Sarvamanya References of the Samasthanam, they had all been obvious Gethu and/or Veena Artistes of the past. The date of origin of this kainkaryam being unknown though, as karna parampara account would unfold, the establishment of the kainkaryam had been ordained by a Divine Decree in a dream by the Ambigai Herself, to the erstwhile Rulers of the famous Sethupathi Samasthanam. The first pair named in that karnaparampara style is one Subbayya with Jhallari and another Seshayya with Veena. The pair had been requested to play on the respective instruments at Sri Yogambal Sannidhanam everyday after Sayaraksha Pujas - as per the Order of the Ambal Herself. May be so, because, even today, in the inner prakaram of this famous temple of Avudayarkoil, no other instrument except this Gethu (Jhallari) is permitted to be played. Even the very inevitable instrument of Nadhaswaram of the temple rituals is allowed at and after the 2nd prakaram only. The Goddess is supposed to be in deep meditation and that the divine meditation is not to be disturbed by any external sounds. Jhallari alone, being under the divine decree itself, considered quite conducive for meditation, has been allowed inside, from time far in the past.

The mentioned and non-mentioned forefathers of the above Tribe had been devout and dedicated to the Sannathi Kainkaryam alone - and so, they had not been known in the outside world of art, perhaps. It was at the time of Sri Harihara Bhagavathar (1895 - 1975), the then rulers of the Samasthanam had been keen to take the delightful instrument to the outside world too for appraisal and appreciation - and Sri Bhagavathar, at the urge of the Sethupathi, had started appearing



on public platforms of the recent past. Almost all the seniors of yesteryears - like Sri Ariyakudi, Sri Chembai, Sri Chittoor, etc. --- had been accompanied by Sri Bhagavathar on Gethu, in many concerts. As for the City of Madras, I learn that the erstwhile Jagannatha Bhaktha Jana Sabha of Egmore had arranged several concerts with Sri Bhagavathar as an accompanist. The Music Academy had listened to the lecture - demonstration on Gethu by Sri Bhagavathar, when late Sri Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer was at the chair of the conference. He had also participated in a few concerts of later years, both as a Gethu Artiste and as a Jalatharangam maestro. Many past lions of the Laya fields, like Sri Azhaganambi, Sri Dakshinamoorthy Pillai, Sri Palghat Mani Iyer, Sri Palani Subbudu etc. had been accompanied by Sri Bhagavathar as Gethu Artiste. Present-day Seniors like B. Rajam Iyer, K.V. Narayanaswamy, T.M. Thiagarajan, Dr. T.K. Moorthy, C.S. Murugabhoopathy etc., had personal knowledge of Sri Harihara Bhagavathar - and they might perhaps be in a better position than myself to talk on this line.

In very recent times, Tamil Isai Sangam had arranged for a lecture-demonstration on Gethu, when Late Sri Sirkazhi was the Chairman of the Conference. 'Sampradhaya' an institution interested in the traditional arts and art-forms had documented a compendium of lecture, demonstrative play & full-scale concert with Gethu. Their audio library at Musiri Subramaniam Salai here does contain the records for public listening. It is still a mystery as to why with all this high-sounding background, Gethu still continues to be a 'rare' instrument. At the time of Late Sri Harihara Bhagavathar, he is understood to have made an appeal at the Academy to arrange for proper students to further popularise this instrument - and Late Sri Tiger, who is reported to have been among the elite audience of the time, has also offered to provide scholarships for two students, at his personal cost. Alas, this could not be so! The Tamil Isai Sangam also, on listening to the demonstration, fortified with active participation of Sri Sirkazhi himself, applauded and offered to project Gethu more to the fore. Again, I do await better times. **MY EMPHASIS AND EARNEST APPEAL IS: PLEASE NEVER MIND ABOUT THE PLAYER OF THE TIME . BUT DO PONDER OVER THE NECESSITY TO PRESERVE THE INSTRUMENT FOR THE POSTERITY . LET NOW BE THE TIME OF ACTION TO PRESERVE AND PERPETUATE THE UNIQUE INSTRUMENT OF GETHU.**

After my father gradually withdrew from stage, due to age, and before myself tottering up on it in bits and pieces, a seizable span of about 15-20 years has been past; and during this particular span, there has not been any appearance of Gethu on stage. So, even amongst the musicians and music lovers of this generation, there is not much of knowledge on this rare piece. Hence my immense anxiety, to atleast present it to the audience at my best! Thethagudi Sri Harihara Sarma, father of Sri T.H. Vinayakaram, had been a staff artiste in AIR., Trichy and at that time, he had tried his hand at this instrument, Gethu. My father and Sri Sarma had alternated in regular Thala Vadhya Katcheris, it is learnt. Presently, my elder

brother, Sri A.H. Seetharama Bhagavathar, who has taken the Harikatha Line in footsteps of the illustrious father, is performing the Sannadhi Kainkaryam at Avudayarkoil. So, we two brothers are now trying our hands at the instrument. In no distant time, we hope to see many more new hands vying with one another in excelling on this instrument. Myself being in employment with the LIC., my availability on the stage is obviously very limited - and that adds to my agony. A couple of college students have recently come up to learn Gethu with me - and I'm shaping them to my best. But I don't know what Providence has in store for them - because, they are yet for higher studies and or proper employment!

Now, coming to the study of the structure and play of this instrument, at the very outset, we may study it in comparison with the Veena & Thambura, with which, Gethu bears a striking resemblance. Veena, being a swara instrument has a set of marked frets along its trunk. Gethu, on the other hand, being a percussive one, does not have any fret at all. Veena has four plus three strings. Gethu has only four. Gethu's four strings are tuned as Saarani, Anusaarani, Panchamam, and Anupanchamam/Tharashadjam, in relation to the chosen Sruti of the given concert. Gethu has to be played with two Mallets or bamboo sticks - and so, too taut or too swinging a nature of the strings will mar the game. So, the tuning and gauging of the strings should be in well-meant proportions to suit the occasions. The requisite grip and bounce needed will define the optimum in the context. While on this, it is pertinent to add that though the tuning of the strings would be of the shadja - panchama combination, while rendering panchama - varja (madhyama struti) compositions, Gethu can still maintain the rhythm, because by suitable modification of the positions, the panchama-ringing may be made unobtrusive and non-perturbing. This is to be listened to for correct assimilation.

The resonant chamber (kudam) in the Veena would be spherical on the lower side, with the upper cover also having a slight bent of curvature. This would help the pliability for the player. Gethu, on the other hand, would want a firm seat and a clear flat for correct bounce of sounds. So, the kudam would be rather spheroidal, a bit flattened at the bottom for seating purposes. In fact, in olden days, the upper surface is understood to have been of the hide, to ensure correct gumukis and ganams for the syllables. Later on, the ensured stability had caused the hide to be replaced by wooden lamina. The nether-bent yali face of the Veena will yield place to a up-facing Yali, with a flat bottom, to serve as the supportive seat on the other side, to match the kudam. The strings are to be subjected to the regulated beats by the mallets and so, coil-string, thick brass type etc. would be taboo for Gethu. Plain silver strings of requisite gauges would be used for the different sets. Also, the jeeva meant for essential use in Thambura to maintain continuity of the sound would again be obvious in Gethu - because the syllables would have to come out curt and correct, without leaping effect of one over the other.

The usual biridais (tension-controls on the strings) for major adjustments and the beads (manikkais) for the finer tunings are available in Gethu. Also, there is a mobile fret available, to alter the vibrating segment according to our need. This alteration of the vibrating segment will help us changing the sthayi from thakku to the thaaram. The physical dictum of the sonametry, 'longer the segment, lower the pitch - shorter the one, higher it would be' is the basis for this usage of the mobile fret.

Two bamboo mallets, one of the length of about 30 cms. and the other of about 38 cms., with wooden handles for grips, are used to play with. The shorter one is used by the left hand, and this is to be used to strike uniformly on all the four strings together, at about the mid of the trunk. The stick will be of about a quarter cm. in diameter, suitably chiselled and polished - to look like a very thin round shaped stick. This is used, (i) to show the sruti basically, (ii) to beat the basic rhythm for the song and (iii) to supplement for fast play of 'pbarans'. The longer one is used by the right hand, on the kudam-side, just close to the fixed fret in the mid-chest of the instrument. This is to be played variedly in different positions and at different levels and this is to produce the various rhythmic manipulations of sounds, depending on the place and mode used. The stick will resemble like a thin knife, with a width of about a cm. in the mid. At both the sticks, adjacent to the grip handles, two brass bangles, with light & fine metallic balls berthed inside the bangles (known as 'Vendayams' in the countrysides) are attached. These attachments are to add a soft and sweet jingle to the string sounds, just as in Ganjira, we introduce a couple of coins to jingle on. In both the Gethu and Ganjira, this jingling should be of the optimum level, to add to the sweetness but not to mar by excess - or else, there would be no difference between the anklet of an exercist and instrumental jingle cited. A limited and measured jingle, with the finely tune string base, will render the proper sruti melakattu on the stage.

As for syllables and calculations, the basis will be the same as it is for any Laya Vadhya -only, there would have to be some specialities and limitations for each instrument and hence, the basis would have to be adopted to suit the particular instrument. For example, a Mridanga Vidwan may use four fingers to operate his instrument - i.e., the index finger, mid-finger, ring & little fingers put together on the one side of the instrument - and the open or closed palm in full as the other as would be needed and he will create the wonder of various permutations and combinations of syllables. The movements will also be in concentric fashions, to ensure quick and short reaches for any given spots of the instrument. Against this, the Gethu man may have to use the right hand stick only, and that too, in linear fashion, thus with inevitable and circumscribing limitations. Obviously, therefore, there has to be atleast three or four times the speed and that with utmost dexterity on the strings, to produce a lateral equivalent rhythmic conversation. That is, an instrument with inevitable limitations is to be presented as lateral equivalent on

the stage. Absolute agility and utmost dexterity are essential ingredients required. Also, a knack of spontaneous amendments on the stage would also be essential. Because, not all the syllables of the Mridangam or Ganjira can as such be played on the Gethu, due to the limitation of movements. Under such circumstances, spontaneous modifications of such intricate syllables, the suit the play on Gethu, may have to be applied. Also, a sense of appropriateness is also to be thought of. For example, if any kaarvai-based Tadaippu karvais', with deliberately interspersed silent intervals of accuracy are attempted individually on Gethu, even if the korvai is capable of being as such be produced on the instrument, yet it would lose its charm. Because, such korvai has its beauty embedded in the calculated accuracy of the silence - and if played on Gethu, the inevitable lingering effect of the sound on the strings will develop a looping effect in-between, thus killing the beauty of the silence architected. So, judicious avoidance is also a knowledge here. If, however, Gethu is running along with the other main instrument, Mridangam and such a korvai is played, the Gethu can happily join-in. For one thing, Mridangam, being dominant, it shall maintain the tempo alright - and Gethu may chime in with pharans, with a deliberate lag of a measured maathra calm, so that the combination will flower into a beautiful bouquet of syllables.

The instrument being a stringed percussive one, it is at once its high point and the low one too. If the atmosphere is conducive and the tuning has been perfect, even the very elementary syllable of rhythm will add guts and gusto to the concert, to immediately welcome the applause from the audience. If, on the other hand either the conduciveness is wanting or the tuning has not been correct and complete, it would be most revealing and hence marring. No amount of rhythmic wizardry would pull you off that snag. Also, the mutual understanding and accommodation between the different artistes on the stage is vital for the purposeful and powerful blossom of any member of the team. Such a concerted and wholesome victory will be a real 'Concert' - other items being mere shows of either exhibition of elimination of one or more of the troupe. On this topic, we are definitely to take more cue from our elders of yesteryears. Multi-membered teams were common then. Amplificating had not been of this much advanced nature. Acoustical planning had also been in its elementary stage. Yet, their concerts were all successful - each individual member being clear and audible with his inherent native best and no one encroaching upon the domain of the other. It was their earnest sense on cohesiveness of the programme - and we may take a lesson or two yet for our follow-up nowadays.

All said and done, as has been the proverbial saying, "concerts and cookings can be rated only on the basis of their presentations". Any past glory and any presumed excellence of the morrow won't fetch marks in either the culinary front

or on the concert platform. What has come out for the presentation that moment is the one to be judged - and it would so be judged. It is the Divine Grace and mahanugraham of elders that would fetch any across the slippery path for success. If somebody is at the top today, easily striding across the stage as a colossus, it is rather an epitome of his immense efforts of the past and intense faith in the Supreme. This should always be our guiding philosophy in any walk, more in the field of art and further more when wielding such rare and difficult instrument as Gethu. So, the Musicians, Music Lovers and Students of Music may well take the cue and do their best in promoting and preserving this rare item for our posterity. For intending students, any learned Laya Vidwan can well teach them the technicalities of the rhythm. Only the mode and style to be adopted to play them on Gethu are to be coached - and I am always prepared to put in my best to let others learn any from me and teach any new thing to me for my betterment. My presentation on this platform this day would pave way for this, I hope and pray!

Before concluding my talk, let me submit that what all I have said hither to fore are the once I know to the best of my knowledge and belief - without claiming any absolute authority on anything stated. Any elder member in the audience who had had the opportunity to know of Gethu or allied matters of the past by personal knowledge may well supplement or correct my statements as would be necessary. I would happily stand improved and corrected, for my future efforts in the groove. Please help me have additional news, if you have any on the topic.

Incidentally, one more piece of news before I conclude, please. A sister instrument of later origin, known as "Swara Gethu", to distinguish it from this earlier laya instrument, had also been in vogue till some 50 years ago or so. It may have been the invention of some ingenious brain attracted both by the stringed rhythm of Gethu and the staccato notes played on instruments like Jalatharangam. The latest known person to have used to play on Swara Gethu has been the late Zamin AL. AR. Chettiar of Kalayarkoil. Now there is nobody to know or play on this instrument - and only museum piece may be available with institution like Tamil Isai Sangam. Old order may change, yielding place to new! But old pieces of art & culture are not to fade off, to yield place to yester items of electronic family only! A very heavy duty is cast on all of us - and it is up to us to absolve ourselves of the burden and acquit ourselves well in the game. May The Omnipotent show us the way and wherewithall!

Thank you all, respected members, thanks to everyone for having given me this very prestigious and pleasant opportunity. I place myself at your absolute discretion in the cause of Art and Art Uplift! Salutations to you!

## SOME EMINENT LAYA VADYAKARAS - Taval, Morsangu & Gethu Vadya

*B.M. Sundaram*

I have been asked to present a paper on eminent Laya Vadya artists of yesteryears and also of the contemporary scene. Since the present Seminar is only on three categories of instruments-Taval, Morsangu and Gethu Vadya. I restrict my topic with artistes, who were eminent in these arts. Down the ages, thousands of them came on this earth, with a life long dedication in nurturing and fostering the arts. I shall speak only about those who were very eminent, for, Eminence and Prominence or Talent and Popularity do not always go hand in hand. First, let me speak about the **Taval artistes**.

Since Taval has a great antiquity, there must have been, no doubt, innumerable artistes, right, from the birth of the instrument. Those names are not now traceable and it is not possible also to do so.

Vallalarkovil Ranga Pillai was one of the early Taval artists, traceable. He lived in the beginning of the 18th Century. Once he played at Vaideesvarankovil (near Mayuram) temple. The Pandarasannidhi (pontiff) of Dharmapuram mutt was on a visit to the temple. As was customary, a 21 gun salute was given in honour. But the pontiff was unhappy, thinking that the age old custom was not properly done, for, he didn't hear the sound of the guns. The temple mangers were put to task. Again, another 21 gun salute was given. Even this time, the sound was not audible to the pontiff. When asked the reason, he was explained that it was perhaps due to the sound of the Taval play. To test it, the pontiff caused a third gun salute and since the sound of the guns didn't reach him this time also, he was wonder struck and called the Taval player, who was none other than Ranga Pillai and said, "What a Voluminous sound your hands possess, something like a thunder! come on! **what do you want?** You may ask for anything and it shall be immediately granted." The poor Ranga Pillai was not in our age, because, he didn't pray for house or lands or wealth. He simply requested that rice-balls to be given to him from the temple kitchen, everyday!

Srivanchiyam Govinda Pillai was a great artiste. He also possessed a sound similar to the thunder and was always mentioned as 'Kodaiyidi Govinda Pillai.' He was a stock accompanist to Timppambaram Natarjasundaram Pillai. (the first to play nagaswaram as duet) and a guru of Ammapettai Pakkiri Pillai. In the nearby agrahara Vishnupuram a mirasdar wanted to arrange Govinda Pillai, to play, in the marriage function of his daughter. The local nagaswara player was sent to Srivanchiyam to fix up the artiste. Govinda Pillai demanded Rupees seven as remuneration (perhaps, that was a high rate, in those days) and the amount was

agreed to. The nagaswara troupe was sitting on the pial of the house and when Govinda Pillai commenced, a sound arose from the tiled ceiling and when he played a 'urttu -chol', a portion of ceiling shattered and fell down. Immediately the Mirasdar rushed to that place and asked Govinda Pillai to stop. At a Ceremonions marriage function, he didn't want to cause the whole house shattered. Instead of the agreed seven rupees, Govinda Pilla was paid ten rupees with dhoti and Angavastram and was carefully sent back to Srivanchiyam.

Needamangalam Govinda Pillai was an Asthana Vidwan of Mysore. He was the maternal uncle and Guru of my father, Meenakshisundaram Pillai. He served as a regular accompanist to the great Nagaswara Vidwan, Kumbakonam Sivakkoz-hundu Pillai. Govinda Pillai always used to stand and play even in marriages and such other social functions, while even the nagaswara artiste and others were seated. He was a 'past master' in 'Vallinam and Mellinam'.

Pasupatikovil Veerabhadra Pillai was also an Asthana Vidwan of Mysore. He was my material grand father and the first income tax assessee in that field. Ramaswami Sivan, elder brother of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer and veerabhadra Pillai were close friends. When Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer rendered the Simhanandana Tala Pallavi in the royal presence at Mysore, none else, but Veerabhadra Pillai, came foreword to accompany him.

Sikkil Singaravelu Pillai was another Vidwan, honoured by everyone in his times. He was an accompanist to Worriar Muthuveeraswami Pillai and lavishly patronised by the kings of Ramanathapuram.

Kancheepuram Kanniyappa Mudaliar (the Isai Velvalas north of the South Arcot and south of Tanjavar districts used their caste titles not as 'Pillai' but only as 'Mudaliar') was a disciple of Sikkil Singaravelu Pillai and ancestor to many excellent laya vidwans.

Tirukkarugavarur Sivagurunatha Pillai uses the first guru of Ammapittai Pakkiri Pillai. A very great Taval Vidwan he was, but, turned out as a mrundagam artiste for Bhagavata mela natya nataka, when this art was revived by Bhartam Melattur Natesa Iyer. Later, Sivagurunatha Pillai became a mrudangam accompanist in the Harikathas of Padmasini Bai, a student of Natesa Iyer and perhaps the first to go abroad with the lady to Europe and with the late veteran congress leader, S. Sathya murthi. Sivagurunatha Pillai's grand daughter married Sangeeta Vidwan, Madurai Somasundaram Pillai.

The celebrity Ammapet Pakkiri Pillai lived for only twentynine years. His name still pervades in the field as an example for mastery in the art. He was a stock accompanist to the legendary nagasvara vidwan, Mannargudi Chinna Pakkiri Pillai, until a misunderstanding crept in between these two. During the festival in the Kandaswami Temple; here at Madras, a wealthy connoissuer, one day brought two Todas (golden bracelets) to be decorated one for the nagaswara artiste and

another for Tivil Pakkiri. After the right hand of Chinna Pakkini was decorated with the toda, the rasika was about to move towards the Tivil artiste, but before that, the nagaswara artiste himself extended his left hand also. Without knowing what to do in such an embarrassing situation, the rasika had no option but to wear the toda on the left wrist of Chinna Pakkiri. To compensate this, a sum of Rupees five hundred with an assurance that on the very next day, a toda would also be presented, was offered to Tivil Pakkiri, who declined it. He felt the nagaswara artist had insulted the art of Tivil and in the midst of the performance, he packed up and returned to his native place. From that day, he stopped to accompany Chinna Pakkiri, until some connoisseurs persisted upon both and persuaded for a reunion. But, both of them would meet only at the performance spot; no exchange of pleasantries; not even a 'namaskaram'. On the other hand, they never failed to appreciate each other's play and cry 'Besh, Sabhash' etc. They honoured the art in spite of their personal grouse, and not the man.

Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai was one of the greatest Tivil Vidwans of the day. Born in the family of a versatile dancers, it seems, he was the first to execute phrases in Gopuccha Yati - Takadhimi Tadinginattom, Taka Tadinginattom, Tatadhinattam, etc - Kannuswami Pillai was a regular accompanist to Tirumarugal Natesa Pillai, and later to Samponnarkovil Ramswami Pillai. Fortunately, we have some gramophone discs to display the mastery of Kannuswami Pillai. Besides Tivil, he was equally an adept in vocal, Nagasvaram and Jalatarangam. The friendship of Pudukottai Nannu Miyan, made Kannuswami Pillai, to try his hands in Dholak, with equal felicity. Speakers and writers have been saying that Tiruvadaturai Rajaratnam Pillai was a disciple of his man or that man. No! He learnt the art only from Kannuswami Pillai, which Rajarathnam Pillai himself had acknowledged, many a time, in public.

Kannuswami Pillai had accompanied on the Tivil, Sarabha Sastri, the flutist, with the violin of Tirukkodikaval Krishnayyar. Pillai's son, Mayuram A.K. Venugopala Pillai was present here the day before. Kannuswami Pillai taught Nagasvaram to Rajaratnam Pillai and Vazhuvoor Veeraswami Pillai; Tivil to Tirumallaivoyil Muthuveer Pillai and Tirurazhaputtur Pasupati Pillai; those who learnt vocal music included Mudikondan Venkatrama Iyer. Kannuswami Pillai's grandson, Vedaranyam Balasubramanian, is right in front of me here.

Vazhuvoor Muthuveer Pillai was an outstanding Tivil Maestro. He was a stock accompanist to Nagore Subbayya Pillai. 'Koodu's or thimbles used by the Tivil artistes to play on the valandalai were first introduced by Muthuveer Pillai, who was an exponent in mathematical intricacies, as well as, highly speedy execution. The rasikas of Coimbatore once desired to honour him with the presentation of a Golden Tivil stick. In that town, here was another giant by name, Munuswami Pillai, who was more a lakshana vidwan. It was customary for him to ask some theoretical question to any visiting Tivil artiste and make him crest-fallen. So, the



organisers didn't invite him to the function held in honour Muthvar Pillai. But, to everyone's surprise, Munuswami Pillai entered the pandal and took a seat in the front, being uninvited, which naturally caused a worry in the minds of the organisers. Many spoke in high terms of Muthuveer Pillai and the Golden Taval stick was about to be presented, this Munuswami Pillai stood up and posed a question. He said "it is no doubt Muthuveer Pillai is a mahavidwan, but, to get a golden stick, he must have some knowledge in the theory also. Let him explain the lakshana of a Taval stick and take it." Muthuveer Pillai, unperturbed replied, "This golden Taval stick is presented to me, only for using it with lakshana and not to define lakshana, by mere words." The present changed to his hands.

Muthuveer Pillai served as a model and mentor to Needamangalam Meenkshi Sundaram Pillai.

Mannargudi Pakkiri Pillai, son of Chockalinga Nattuvanar, started his career initially as a dance master but switched over to Taval. He was the regular accompanist to Mannargudi Chinna Pakkiri Pillai, until Ammapatti Pakkiri Pillai joined the troupe. Later, Pakkiri Pillai left playing the Taval and became an outstanding Konakol vidwan, to team with Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Kancheepuram Naina Pillai and such others.

Karaikal Malaipperumal Pillai was a commendable expert in playing 'Jatis'. Palani Muthayya Pillai, father of the Mrudangam maestro, Palani Subramania Pillai was perhaps the first to introduce mathematically complex solfegios on the Taval, in abundance. He was the disciple of Pudukottai Manpoondia Pillai, but left playing Taval and took up the Mrudangam. His second wife, Anjugam Ammal, is said to be the first lady musician to render RTP in concerts.

Lalgudi 'Kodaiyidi' Angappa Pillai was another great exponent on the Taval and the guru of Malaikkottai 'Panjami' Pillai.

A new era dawned in the history of Taval, with the advent of my father, Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai. He was a non - pareil in the art, I do not wish to dwell upon the subject, since, our esteemed Bangalore Sri K. Venkataram spoke extensively about him, day before.

Malaikkottai Panchapakesa Pillai (usually addressed as 'Panjami') was an equipollent to Meenakshisundaram Pillai. He was also a good vocalist, composer (he has composed many Chittasvaras to the Kritis of Sri Tyagraja besides his own compositions) and a great Khanjira vidwan. Unfortunately he died in his 29th year.

Pandanathur Ratnam Pillai, the first disciple of Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai, was a very talented Taval artiste. He possessed a beautiful figure also.

Karandai Ratnam Pillai, a Laya expert, was the stock accompanist to Madurai Ponnuswami Pillai and he was the first Taval artist to be honoured by the king of Baroda.

In Kumbakonam, there was a very eminent Taval player, by name, Tada Krishnan, since he hailed from the community of Dasaris. He was a disciple of Kumbakonam Chakrapani Pillai. Tada Krishnan's disciple was Kumbakonam Tangavel. Pillai, whose execution of the syllable 'Tom' is adored even this day.

Koranadu Govindaraja Pillai, the second disciple of Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai was, for long, in the set of Tiruvuzhimizhalai Brothers.

Tiruvazhaputhur Pasupati Pillai, a disciple of Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai, was the greatest banyan - guru. There could be no one who had not been trained by him. Due to some curious handicap, he was unable to play Taval but became the greatest teacher. The present day prominent Taval Vidwan, Tiruvazhaputtur A. Kaliyamurthi is a grandson of Pasupati Pillai.

Nachiyarkovil Saktivel Pillai. His original name was Dakshinamurthi. The Maharaja of Mysore used to say that his Taval stick is nothing but saktivel and thus, he himself came to be called Saktivel Pillai. He was with Semponnarkovil Ramaswami Pillai, for a long time. Here is a funny incident. Once, during a performance Saktivelu was not attentive, at a particular stage, thereby causing inconvenience to the Nagasvara artiste. Ramaswami Pillai, in a fit of temper admonished Saktivel Pillai with the words, "You have all come to play Taval, where as, you are fit only to drive a jutka (cart drawn by a horse)." The performance was over. Saktivel Pillai, back home, regretted by a letter, that he was not in a position to come and play Taval anymore. Persuasions from Ramaswami Pillai were of no avail. Months later, Ramaswami Pillai came to Kumbakonam for a marriage performance. As soon as he got into the cart, he felt that the face of the Jutka driver was very familiar. On enquiry the driver, "Yes, I am Saktivel. As per your suggestion, I left playing Taval and took up this." Can we think about such a thing in our times?

Tiruccadaiyur Chinnayya Pillai's name is still adored as for surgically precise Laya - Kalapramana. He was all-along with the Pallavi Giant, Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Pillai. Vaidyanatha Pillai always used to say, "We must be very careful in deciding the Kalapramana before we commence. If once started then it will be Chinnayya's. Even for our convenience, we cannot make the Kalapramana a bit slow or fast. Even if we do so, Chinnayya wont come out."

Papanasam Sreeman Pillai was an asthana Vidwan of Mysore. It is said that it was only Sreeman Pillai who went to Jaffna and trained a number of Taval stalwarts in that country.

Vedaranyam Poduchami Pillai was another worthy Taval Vidwan. His head or body wont move even slightly, while he was playing. Vidwans used to say that a

lemon kept on the centre of head, would never fall, for how much so ever time he played. Some artists of Ceylon, due to professional spite, resorted to black magic with the result he, lost his eyesight and returned to India, to suffer till his end.

'Layappindam' was, the honorific of Tirumullaivoyil Muthuveer Pillai. Being a disciple of Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai and the son in law of Vazhuvoor Muthuveer Pillai, he was adept in mathematically terse playing.

Kavalakkudi Somasundaram Pillai was yet another 'mathematician' with an anchored laya suddha. He was a repository of thousands of jatis.

Papanasam Ramaswami Pillai was a contemporary of and mostly liked by Needamangalam Meenakshisundaram Pillai. With voluminous 'Nada', clarity was a hall mark in his playing.

All vidwans used to say 'Pachai Marathu Ani' (in Tamil) meaning 'as a nail fixed on a tender tree.'

Nachiyarkovil Raghava Pillai, son in law and disciple of Meenakshisundaram Pillai was an outstanding Taval artist of our times. His execution of the syllable 'Ta' has no equal till this day.

Kattumannarkovil Tirunarayana Pillai was next only to my father in the rendition of 'Nadaicchol'.

Tattamangalam Ponnai was a talented Taval artist of Coimbatore district. Because of his long moustache, he was mentioned only as 'Ravanesvara'.

Yazhpannam Kamakshi Sundaram Pillai was an outstanding maestro in Ceylon. He, for some time, served in the troupe of Tiruvuzhimizhalai brothers. He possessed speedy fingers.

'Laya Gnana Karpanai Kalanidhi' was the fitting title to Vadapadimangalam Dakshina murthi Pillai, who served in the Madras Government Music College, as the lecturer in Taval.

Every rasika would feel that he is enjoying the sweet sounds of a mrudangam, when Dakshinamurthi Pillai played. A man of principles he was, and for the same just reason, he lost many concert opportunities. In the field of Taval, he was mentioned as 'Vanangamudi' ( a person whose head never bows).

It would be just like "selling a pin in the smith's workshop" if I say about my illustrious brother, Needamangalam Shanmukhavadivel. Many vidwans and connoisseurs feel that he surpassed his father, while some others feel that he played only mrudangam with the help of a Taval. Anyway, he was a most dreaded Taval maestro.

I am always reminded of the words of Abul Fazl, while he described the prowess of Tansen, that "None equalled Tansen in the past century and none would reach

his proximity in the future century also", whenever I think of the celebrity, Yazhpannam Dakshinamurthi. There was none who excelled him. Perfection of Laya, excessive speed in the fingers and thrilling mathematical manipulations, all in one, that was Dakshinamurthi. Those who have not heard him, at least once, are really unlucky.

Shanmukhavadivelu, son of Tirumullaivoyil Muthuveer Pillai was the most talented among the up and coming youths. But, due to professional jealousy, he was murdered, before he reached his 32nd year of age.

A great exponent on the Tavil, with a pleasing personality and always with a smile on the lips, was Tiruvizhandur Ramadoss Pillai. Even when more than five or six Tavils participate in a percussion ensemble, Ramadoss, would play in the original and correct Kalapramana, after the rendering of some other Tavil players.

Tirupati Muniramayya, Annavarapu Basavayya, Guntupalli Guravayya were some talented Tavil artists of Andhra Pradesh.

Among our present day artistes Valangaiman Shanmukhasundaram Pillai, Parayar Venugopala Pillai, Perumpallam Venkatesa Pillai, Karandai Shanmukha Pillai, Emani Raghavayya, Bangalore Munivenkatappa and such others may be mentioned. The next generation of talented Tavil artistes comprises of Haridwaramangalam A.K. Palanivel, Tiruvazhaputtur A. Kaliyamurthi, Tanjavur T.R. Govindarajan (who demonstrated here on the other day), Vedaranyam G. Balasubramaniam (who is sitting in front of me now), Valayapatti A.R. Subramaniam, Mannargudi Vasudevan, Tiruppunkur Muthukumara Swami and Bhoosurapalli Venkateswarulu.

While speaking about the great morsangu Vidwans, the earliest traceable name is that of Coimbatore Venkoba Rao. The other galaxy consisted of Adichapuram Sectarama Iyer, Sacchidanandam and Mannargudi Natesa Pillai. It was only the latter who procured a high status to this instrument on the concert style.

Pudukottai Mahadevan; Srirangam Kannan, Mayuram Rajaraman, Vazhuvur Ravi, Bangalore L. Bheemachar and B. Rajashekar are some among many, in the contemporary scene.

Gettuvadyam is a rare one and not handled by many. Our friend Sri Subramaniam just now mentioned some early names Kuppayyar, Seetaramayyar etc. But the greatest exponent was Avudayarkoil Harihara Bhagavata and he bequeathed this treasure to his sons Seetarama Bhagavata and H. Subramaniam. A commendable Laya Vadya Nipuna who is equally adept in handling this Gettuvadya is our esteemed friend, Bangalore Sri K. Venkataram.

What I said so far are only few names out of thousands. I might have left some important names, but not at all intentionally. I thank the Percussive Arts Centre for providing me a nice opportunity to think about some great laya vadya exponents.

## JALATARANGAM & SOME PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

*Excerpts from the talk of Sri. B. M. Sundaram on 3.6.1988 during the Thaalavaadyothsava introducing Jalatarangam Anayampatti Ganesan & the percussion instruments featured.*

Esteemed President of the Conference, Respected President, Director and other members of the Percussive Art Center. Vidwans, Vidushis and all the ideal listeners who have assembled here. My hearty namaskaras to all of you.

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to participate in this festival, this year also and to say a few words about the instruments which are to treat us this evening with an excellent musical feast. I take this opportunity to compliment my good friend Umayalpuram Sri K.Sivaraman, an outstanding Mrudanga Vidwan on his conferment of this prestigious Palghat Mani Award and also the percussive Art Center for having chosen him for this honour. Today's music concert is a novel but worthy experiment. Jalatarangam, a very subtle and rare instrument, encircled by the Laya Lahari troupe is going to fill up the hall with its sweet music.

Jalatarangam is an instrument handled in India by eminent musicians from very ancient times. The term is of sanskrit language giving the meaning "Water waves". Playing on the Jalatarangam has been mentioned as one among the 64 arts. Originally this was called 'Udaka Vadya' which means 'Water musical instrument'. The term was felt as inadequate and substituted as 'Udaka Kumbha Vadya'. Later is called 'Kumbha Vadya' and still later it acquired the name 'Jalatarangam' which came to stay. Srouta Sutras of our Hindu scriptures postulate that the music of Veena and Jalatarangam is to engulf the Yagasala, where yagnas are performed. The chapter, entitled 'Sarva Vadya Lakshanam' in 'Uma Maheswara Bharatam' gives Jalatarangam as one among the 'Ashtadasa Vadyas'. 'Sangeeta Parijata' of Ahobala and the Padas of the 'Ashta Chhapa' poets mention this instrument. We also find the name of the instrument in 'Karana Agama', 'Kama Sutra' of Vatsyaana and such other works. We understand that this instrument was greatly prevalent in Java, Sumatra and Pali islands. Jalatarangam was a part of the 'Gamelan Music' of Indonesia and sculptures found in the Brahmanand Temple in Jor Djakarta built in the 9th Century A.D. also contain that of Jalatarangam. Historians tell us that when Alexander the Great returned to Macedonia after conquering India, some musicians also followed him to Greece, among whom a Jalatarangam artiste was also there. It is also said sculputural reliefs of this

instrument may still be found on some Pyramids of Egypt. We may go on citing such references to trace the antiquity of this instrument.

Jalatarangam consists of 18 porcelain cups of distinct sonorousness arranged in a semi-circle in front of the performer. The empty cups when struck, give notes of different pitch. Metal cups were originally used which were later substituted by porcelain cups, after the introduction of porcelain cups in China from about the 10th Century A.D. 'Sangeeta Sara' a musical treatise classifies Jalatarangam into 2 varieties. 'Uttama' -- that which consists of 22 cups; 'Madhyama' -- that which has 15 cups. The pitch of the note emitted by a cup is inversely proportionate to its size, weight and quantity of water in it. Bigger cups give notes of lesser pitch and smaller ones, notes of higher pitch. The water in the cups serves in four ways:

- a) to increase or decrease the pitch with ease, by removal or addition of water;
- b) to give sustained notes;
- c) to enable the graces -- Gamakas -- to be played by the sticks, coming into contact with the water bowls and;
- d) to give stability to the cups and prevent them from toppling over, during the play.

The cups are arranged in the increasing order of pitch from left to right. They are struck with the help of two thin bamboo or nutmeg sticks (*Myristica Fragrans*).

Many consider that Gamakas cannot be produced on this instrument. Though it is true to some extent, musicians with extreme skill could produce them to the possible extent. Jalatarangam is more a solo instrument but sometimes also used in Orchestra. Scales employing quarter tones can be played on it with ease. It has a characteristic tone colour. Some speedy passages can be played on this instrument while the players also develop a sharp sense of pitch (*Sruti Gnana*). This age-old fine art was patronised by kings and nobles and this wonderful music continued to have healthy existence, until it fell into evil days on account of lack of patronage and gradually began to fade out.

It is very rare to find someone learning and practising this instrument but not without some reasons. To tune the cups, one should possess much patience and to play upon them with dexterity is really a hard task possible only to those who dedicate their lives for that. Longer duration is necessary to arrange and to tune the cups while to transport this fragile instrument from place to place is another difficulty. Further, this rare instrument has practically no patronage except from All India Radio and a few sabhas. Probably because of these reasons, nobody comes forward to learn this art which is already 'one foot in the grave'.

Generation gap has crippled our knowledge about the musicians who handled Jalatarangam in the bygone days. The first traceable name is that of Ustad Ali Bux of Baroda. 'Rettai Pallavi' Kunrakkudi Krishna Iyer of the Ramanathapuram Samasthanam is learnt to have had proficiency in this art. Veena Seshana of Mysore, Ramanathapuram Subramania Pillai, Kalayarkoil Subbayyar, Thanjavur Rama Rao, Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai, Sadhu Ganapathi of Tiruvaiyaru, Woraiyer Ramaswami Pillai, Devendrappa of Mysore were some great masters of the past. All the above were experts on this instrument, though professionally they were otherwise. The only person, who dedicated his entire life for learning, mastering, propagating and elevating to pinnacles the art of Jalatarangam was Anayampatti Subbayyar. Subbayyar is another name of Jalatarangam. If this art exists today, it is only because of the tireless efforts of Subbayyar who was an Ashthana Vidwan of Mysore and had been honoured by numberless other Princes and Zamindars. There might have been many Jalatarangam players, wholly or partially. We are able to get the names on only some of them. Perur Gopalakrishna Dikshitar, Madras Ramanayya Chettiar, Keehasivalpatti Venkattaramana Rao, Anyampatti Kuppuswami and Dhandapani were some among them. In the North Indian music also, the names of few Jalatarangam players are known to us, such as, Ustad Ali Bux Manhar Barve of Bombay, K.L.Sood, Yasim Khan and Kurban Khan. The art of Jalatarangam is on the decline but if adequate and proper encouragement is given, we may hope more aspirants would turn towards this instrument. The art should never become defunct -- this was Anyampatti Subbayyar's only ambition. His eldest son Kuppuswami was also a reputed Jalatarangam artiste. He passed away, even when his father was alive. Anyampatti Dhandapani, the second son of Subbayyar took up the mantel after his father and carried the torch which shone with great lustre until death snatched him away in 1984. My good friend and colleague Anayampatti Sri Ganesan, another son of Subbayyar is a vocalist and also a violinist. He used to accompany on the violin in the Jalatarangam concerts of his deceased brother. As luck would have it, Sri Ganesan paid a visit to Kanchi to seek the blessings of His Holiness the Paramacharya. Introduced as the son of so and so, Sri Ganesan was blessed by the sage with the words "Jalatarangam is your family treasure. Is it not your duty to carry the torch lit by your father and oiled by your brothers?. Try your hand on it". But my friend was very diffident. He was compelled by some well-wishers and the Jalatarangam was brought from the Late Dhandapani's house and Sri Ganesan experimented to play, but in such an excellent manner as if by a magical power. That was the only day he practised. From then on, he has been getting invitations from various parts of our country, for Jalatarangam performances. Being the disciple of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar, he has acquired proficiency in vocal and instrumental music. Now he has become a "Three-in-one". We wish him "May his tribe increase".

## MRIDANGAM

Mridangam is one of the earliest percussive instruments of India. Right from the Holy Scriptures, all the ancient literature speak vividly about this exquisite instrument. It has been referred to in almost all the Sangam Literature with the name, 'TANNUMAI'. Bharata's Natya Sastra' says, this instrument was created by Swati. Sarngadeva states the name 'Mrudanga' was given to the instrument, Pushkara, by Sage Bharata.

*"Proktam Mrudanga Sabdina Muninā Pushkaratrayam" [SR - IV: 1025]*

Pushkara is said to have had three faces and this type fetched the name 'Bhanda Vadya'. Probably, upto the time of Poet Kalidasa, Pushkara was in vogue. 'Marjana' - the black coloured paste - is now a days made with boiled rice and the powder of a particular stone and applied on the Mrudanga. But, in the earlier days, only earth was used as Marjana and hence the name, Mrudangam.

*"Mruttikā lipena Sastā layā karyā tu mārjanā"* [NS] Another sloka from 'Natya Sastra' suggests that the very instrument itself might have been made with earth.

*"Mrunmayatvād Mrudangastu Bhāndam Bhramayateeti cha". [33: 273]*

The regular music concert came into existence only during the last century. Before that, Mrudangam was used as an accompaniment in South India, only in Bharatanatya and Katha Kalakshepams. Hence, there existed only two styles of playing - (1) playing for Bharatanatya, and (2) playing for Kathakalakshepa. The playing style for Bharatanatya was nurtured and developed by great Natyacharyas and that for the kathakalakshepa was introduced and fostered by the Marathas. An excellent blending of these two styles by the great Mrudangam maestro, Thanjavur Vaidyanatha Iyer, culminated as the 'Thanjavur style' and accredited as the best one. Among the hundreds of Vaidyanatha Iyer's disciples, the names of the late palghat Mani Iyer, Sri T.K. Murthi and our Umayalpuram Sri Sivaraman, may be worth mentioning. There were innumerable masters of mrudangam in South India, who have sumptuously contributed to the growth of the art, the names of many of them, I have already given in my monograph, "Great Layavadyakaras of Karnataka Music", and hence avoid repeating here.

A mrudangam artiste is expected to possess a fair knowledge of two aspects. Accompanying a vocal or an instrument, for a keertana or a Pallavi, for neraval or swaraprastara, suitably and distinctly that would very much help the main performer, as well as, benefit the listeners. Secondly, he must be able to present a short or long spell of solo or in combination with other instruments. To combine with upa pakka vadyas and to lead the percussion ensemble is really a great thing. An artiste may be good on his own instruments, but may have a sort of complex,



when he sees on the dais, some upa pakka vadya artistes. One may not be deemed to be worthy, unless he maintains a rapport, not only with the main performer but also with other percussion artists on the stage and with the audience. This itself is an art and an essential requisite for a mrudangam artiste.

According to the 'Natya Sastra', an ideal mrudangam player should possess a fair knowledge in talas, occasions and the Sastra; otherwise, he would simply be a 'striker of hides'.

*"Atalagnam Akalagnam Asastragnam cha Vadakam Charmaghatatakam ityevam pravadanti manee shina: :{33:240}*

## TAVIL

Tavil, also called 'Dolu' is another main percussive instrument. The origin of this instrument is ascribed to Ravanaesvara, who is said to have created it, to wake up Kumbhakarna.

*"Kumbhakarnasya bodhāntham Rāvanena Vinirnitam".*

*[Abhinava Bharata Sara Sangraha]*

Scholars are of opinion that the instrument 'Dindima', mentioned in 'Natya sastra' and other ancient literature is nothing but the Tavil of the present day. The syllable 'Ta' means 'blemish' and 'il' means 'devoid of'-making Tavil as a 'blemishless instrument'. The term 'Tavil' was first used by Saint Arunagirinatha, of the 15th c. in his 'Tiruppugazh', according to the traceable information.

The blending of Mathematics and Melody is the crest-jewel of our musical system. By giving pre-dominance to such intricate, mathematics, oriented rhythmic passages, Tavil has ever since, rightly served as a beacon light for other percussive instruments. Since Tavil does not possess the pitches to a great extent, as some other percussives like the mrudangam do, the Tavil artiste, necessarily has to introduce a 'Laya Visesha', right from the commencement of the play, to win the appreciation of the listeners. The very start of Tavil playing is in Vishama eduppu-Anagata graha.

The artiste usually introduces a gatibheda, even during the first spell of playing.

All the percussive instruments that take part in a classical music concert, begin only after the song is commenced. For instance, let's take up the mrudangam. It has no work, until the song is begun. Only when any composition is rendered, the mrudangam, suitably follows it, adhering to the musical and tala structures of the said composition. But, only in a Nagaswara performance even the main instrument-the Nagaswara-commences only after a Tavil play. When once a Tavil player begins,

he has no rest, till the end of the performance, unless there is some short interval or more Taval vidwans, to play in turn. Even during the Raga Alapana on the Nagaswara, he goes on playing proper solfa passages, that suits the laya of raga.

This instrument has another important uniqueness. At the time of learning the primary lessons, placements for producing various syllables are taught. For instance, 'Tom' with the stick at the Toppi side, just above the central point; 'Ta' at the first upper portion of the valandaki, and so on. This placement is strictly adhered to, even while executing complicated rhythmic phrases, whatever be the speed. To explain the point further, the syllable 'Ta' is sounded on the mrudangam, by striking hard at the middle or slightly lower portion of the toppi. This is how it is taught, during the initial training. But, when the 'farans' or speedy phrases are played, the placement gets changed and 'Ta' is produced on the Valandeli itself. On the other hand, any syllable - Ta or Ti; Ta or Ki; Nam or Tom-let it be anyone - it is played on the Taval only at the exact placement, as taught initially.

Though this instrument is also used today as an accompaniment to vocal or instrumental music - even in Bharatanatyam - formerly it maintained a time-honoured tradition to be the accompaniment, only to Nagaswara, the wind instrument that came up for the temple rituals. The contribution of the Taval for mathematical manipulations is immense and deservedly it acquired the honorific 'Raja Vadya' -King among the instruments.

Who could be called a real Taval Vidwan?

Purity, Patience, obedience to seniors and elders, good character, knowledge of the sound produced and the phrases executed, knowledge about the tonal quality of the wood and the hide - these are said to be the essential requisites for a Taval Player.

## KONAKOL

'Konakol', is not actually an instrument. The term took its birth from the Tamil word 'Konipittal' - orally reciting the rhythmic syllables. 'Kona' or 'Konu' is a contraction of 'Konippu'. 'Kol' means 'Presentation'. Presenting the rhythmic syllables orally is 'Konakol'. The origin of this art may be traced to Bharatanatyam. In dance performances, the Natyacharyas recite the solfa passages. Students of Mrudangam, Taval or any such instrument, during their Gurukulavasa, have to first recite the rhythmic phrases orally and then only practise on their respective instruments. Even masters on the percussive arts have to prepare or compose Jatis, Nadais, Korvais and Moharas only orally for executing them later on the instrument.

Konakol was introduced on the concert stage by 'Layasimham' Mannargudi Pakkiri - Pillai, who was originally a Taval Vidwan, but left it only to become a full fledged konakol artiste, and mostly teamed with Kanchipuram Nayana Pillai, the 'Pallavi Colossus'. Very soon, he rose to eminence and dreaded by every musician of his times, by virtue of his incomparable mastery in the art and precision of laya. His son, Vaidyalingam Pillai also was a great konakol vidwan. This art may also be classified as a rare one, since, there were and are only few masters.

The Vocalist should have some prior experience in combining with Konakol. Otherwise, he may get confused, sometimes. I wish to narrate an incident, that took place, about twenty five years ago. A very prominent vocalist once told me that he desired to have Konakol also, in one of his performances. So, I requested Mannargudi Vaidyalingam Pillai, to participate in that concert, During the swaraprastara, in one of the turns, the singer and the Konakol artiste joined, which resulted in confusion, not only to the vocalist, but also among the audience. The so popular vocalist cut a very sorry figure, for, instead of singingswaras he encroached the other side and started to recite the solfa passages.

Konakol is an art of high merit and if rendered in the proper manner, it would add lustre to the performance and evoke sustained enthusiasm among the listeners.

## GETTUVADYA

Gettuvadya is more or less a small veena in shape, having only four strings and struck upon with two tiny sticks. It is both a Sruti and Laya Vadya and used only as a percussion. As I said earlier, Gettuvadya is wrongly identified, by some, as the Jhallari of the olden days. 'Jharjara', an instrument mentioned in ancient works, may be the fore-runner of Gettuvadya.

This instrument is of two kinds: (1) Ordinary Gettu - and (2) Swaragettu. In the first variety the four strings are tuned to Sarani, Anusarani, Panchama & Anupanchama, but not changed. When Panchama varja ragas or compositions in such ragas are rendered, the panchama strings are tuned to Madhyama, as is done in the Tambura, to avoid any discordant sound. The kudam is completely wooden. On the other hand, the swaragettu has a wooden bowl like kudam, covered on the upper side with hide. The strings are also tuned to vādi and samvādi notes of each raga rendered. The two sticks, used for striking, are not of even shape. One will be tied with a small jingle and the other slightly curved.

Gettuvadya is commonly used in the daily rituals of Avudayarkoil temple. Even Nagaswara melam is not permitted in the inner precincts of this temple, at the time of the diety's procession. The Goddess of that temple is said to be in deep meditation and to avoid disturbing Her, only gettuvadya has got the sanction to be played.

Avudayarcoil Harihara Bhagavata, who hailed from a family of Gettuvadya artistes, was a notable Harikatha performer. He also learnt Jalataranga from Anayampatti Subbayar, our Sri Ganesha's father, and used to give performances. But he was more and more a Gettuvadya Vidwan and it was he, who introduced this instrument on the concert platform. I don't think there are more than a handful of Gettuvadya artistes, including Sri Seetaraman and Sri Subramanyam, sons of Harihara Bhagavata.

## GHATAM

All of you may remember, I spoke about Ghatam, in the Seminar here on 'Terracota musical instruments,' last year. Among the Upapakka vadyas, Ghatam occupies an important place. The Sanskrit term 'Ghatam' means an 'earthen pot'. This instrument got the name since it is made of clay. In Valmiki's Ramayana, we find the name of a musical instrument, Kalasee:

*"Kalaseem Apaviddhanya Prasoota  
Bhati Bhatmini" (Sundara: 10:46)*

'Kalasa' also means a pot and it is presumed that the usage refers to our Ghatam.

Sarangadeva says:

*"Pataho marddalaschata Hudukka Karata Ghata:"*

Other writers on music like Sudhakalasa, Subhankara and Srikantha have also cited this instrument. Munimadi Chikka Bhoopala and King Tulaja have simply quoted from 'Sangeeta Ratnakara', the verses that speak about Ghatam.

In ancient Tamil literature, mention about an instrument called 'Mondai' is there. Saint Tirugnanasambandar in one of his Tevara Hymns says:

*"Kuzhalinosai Veenai Mondai Kotta Muzhavadira".*

The Tamil Lexicon "Choodamani Nighantu" equates Mondai with Kudamuzha. Kudamuzha is the Panchamukhavadya, found in the Tiruvarur temple. Though the words, 'Kuda' and Muzhavu' mean 'a pot' and 'a percussion instrument' respectively, we cannot ascertain that Kudamuzhavu and Ghatam are one and the same. Saint Tirunavukkarasar, a contemporary of Tirugnanasambandar gives the names of Kudamuzha and Mondai in his Tevaram, making them distinct from each other.

*'Pidava Mondai Kudamuzhavam  
Kodukotti Kuzhalum Onga ...."*

'Mondai' is a Tamil word meaning a pot. In a brochure on Musical instruments, Mondai has been illustrated as a small one-sided drum, which lacks any authenticity.

'Perunkadai', a work belonging to the 4th C uses the term 'Ghatam'.

*"Ghata Muzhakinmissai idaiyidaiye*

*There is another age old verse:*

*"Tayir Sumandu Valai Suzhalum*

*Ghatam Veesi ..... "*

Here the word 'Ghatam' is used to indicate a mud pot containing curd. The Borobudur relic of the 8th C. A.D. portrays a player in a squatted posture and playing on the Ghatam with both hands, which only bears evidence to the fact, that this instrument was popularly in vogue, since very early times.

Ghatam is used with the names 'Mutki' and 'Gajri', in Rajasthan. In the valley of Kashmir and also in the plains of Sind, this instrument is prevalent in Choruses and orchestras, but with the name, 'Noot'. 'Noot' is placed in front of the player on the floor or on the lap with its mouth facing upward.

Many names such as Ranga Rao and Shama Rao of Mysore, Guruswami Iyer, son of Lalgudi Rammayyar and Polagam Chidambara Iyer have been associated with Ghatam.

Umayalpuram, a village near Kumbakonam has the pride of having produced a lot of musicians, both vocal and instrumental; including Sundara Bhagavata and Krishna Bhagavata, direct disciples of Saint Sri Tyagaraja. Sundara Iyer of that place and his cousin Narayana Iyer were experts on this instrument. The credit for making the Ghatam, a popular concert instrument, goes to Palani Krishnayyar. Some other masters in this field were Palani Tangappayyar, Sikkil Narayana Pillai, Madurai Ghatam Mani Iyer, Umayalpuram Kothandarama Iyer, son of Narayana Iyer, Tiruvilvamalai Vilvadri Iyer, Kottangudi Srinivasa Iyer and Alangudi Ramachandran.

Ghatams are available for various pitches, unlike the Taval and Khanjari. But the snag is that, in case if the main performer wants to increase or reduce the pitch, tuning or adjusting to the new pitch is not fully possible in Ghatam. Only a minimum adjustment can be made with the help of wax. Though with such limitations, it has come to be a very prominent Upapakkavadya, being dexterously handled by brilliant exponents.

## MORSANGU

Next let me say about Morsangu, another Layavadya. The correct name of this instrument is 'Mukha Sankha'. It is held in the mouth and played by striking the metal cord, called 'the tongue' with the forefinger. The shape of it resembles Sankha -- the conch and hence it acquired the name, 'Mukha Sankha', which was later corrupted as Morchang, Morsing and so on. 'Abhinava Bharata Sara Sangraham' describes it.

*"Drutva cha Ekena Hastena Mukhena Srutimeerayet  
mukhavadyam idam proktam Bhandakootamiti cha" (Sl:311)*

From the above verse, we understand that the Mukhavadya -- the mukha Sankha had yet another name, 'Bhandakoota'. 'Vadya Prakasa', a treatise on musical instruments mentions this instrument.

*"Vijaya Mukha Sankha Muralee Poorve Marchi Prabhodayet" (Sl:81)*

Mukha Sankha or the Morsangu is called the 'Jew's Harp' in English. During the 19th Century, the young folk of Israel, who belongs to the Hebrew community, used to play this instrument at night, to attract and fascinate young girls. Because of the same reason, a ban prohibiting the use of the Jew's harp, was imposed by the Government. Even in our own country, particularly, in the southern villages, there prevails a belief that Mohini-- the female spirit -- would appear, if morsangu is sounded during the late hours.

This instrument is in currency with some people of Himachal Pradesh, Assam and among the hill tribes of Deccan. 'Yatottaraga Sutta', a Buddhist work tells us that a Bikku, by name Ananda, used to sound Mukha Sankha, as soon as he enters the classroom, as a signal indicating that the class would commence then.

The work 'Music of Israel' states that King Solomon was presented, at the time of his wedding with the daughter of King Pharaohs, more than one hundred musical instruments, which included a Jew's Harp. According to the 'History of the Sui Dynasty', Mukha Sankha was one among the twenty three musical instruments sent from India as presents to the ruler of North Western China, Chang Chang Hua, of the 4th century A.D.

Morsangu is a very handy instrument, made of iron, though the people of Israel as is known used silver for this. Among all others, Sami Asari of Thanjavur, who lived about four decades ago, was the best maker of Morsangu.

The earliest traceable Morsangu artiste was Mysore Lakshmanachar. Adichapuram Seetarama Iyer, secured a place for this instrument in music performances. Mannargudi Natesa Pillai was a very popular exponent on Morsangu. Nattakudi Harihara Sarma and many others have handled this, with excellence.

## KHANJARI

Khanjira or Khanjari, to be more correct, is another percussive instrument, with which, all of us are very familiar. Such instruments possessing only one side, have been spoken of, in ancient Tamil literature, as 'Grukat parai'. 'Jhallari' is the older name of khanjari. 'Kumara Tantra' praises Lord Subrahmanya, as one who is pleased with Jhallari.

*Jhallari Vādyā Supriya:*

We find the name Jhallari in many Agamas also. 'Karanagama' says:

*Jhallari cha ishtakāmyārthā.*

The playing of Jhallari offers, whatever is desired. Sage Bharata has stated that the creator of this instrument is, again, sage Swati. 'Vadya Prakasa' enumerates many percussive instruments, among which jhallari finds a place.

*"Hudukkā Dukulee chaira Bhāndātodyā Jhallari" [SI.55]*

Mrudanga, Dardura and Panava, among the drums, are the major limbs, while Jhallari and Pataha, belong to the minor variety, according to the 'Natya Sastra'.

*Mrudanga Darduras chaiva Panaveshva Samgnite'*

*Jhallaree Patahādeeni Pratyangāni tathaiva cha || [33:16]*

The term 'Jhallari' is tamilicised and written as 'Sallari' in early Tamil works. Saint Tirugnana Sambandar of the 6th Century A.D. who gave us the immortal 'Tevaram' mentions this instrument in some of his hymns.

'Kalladam', a work of the 6th century, says that Sallari was the instrument used at the time of Siva's dancing, for the sake of Patanjali and Vyaghrapada.

'Jhallari' is wrongly identified by some, as the 'Gettuvadya'. 'Malaipadukadam', one of the Sangam classics describes Sallari as:

*"Kodihavar Olikkum Vallavar Ellari". (Tamil)*

In this line, Sallari is given as Ellari. It is quite common to substitute Ja or Jya with Ya - as we see in the case of 'Jya' and its Tamil usage 'Yazh'; Jacob Judbasbi and yugbandy and Yacob etc. Some authors have written that ellari is only 'Kaimani' - cymbals. The work mentioned above speaks that deer's skin was used for this one eyed drum. Gettuvadya, on the other hand, is neither a drum nor one - sided. Many ancient works in Tamil, as also 'Sangeeta Ratnakara' help us to clearly identify Jhallari as the present day khanjari.

*"Sasootrakatakam Randhradvayam Kanthe cha bibhratee.*

*Charmānaddha Vādāna Jhallari Parikeertithā ||*

*Vamahastadhrutā sa cha vadyā Dakshinapānina [SR:6:1137-1139]*

After giving the radius, circumference and hollowness, in terms of inches, Sarangadeva says it has a flat face, two small coins fixed covered with hide and has to be played by the right hand, holding it by the left.

Though deer's skin was used in the early days of history, as mentioned in the Tamil Classic, 'Malaipadu kadam', only the hide of the double-tongued lizard - Lacerta iguana - called Udumbu in Tamil, is used in the present times.

Unless one is endowed with extreme talent, it will be difficult for him to repeat the passages, on this single sided percussion, after the turn of the Mrudangam, during the laya vinyasa.

Khanjari occupies a very important place on the concert dais, thanks to the painstaking efforts and dedication of great stalwarts in this art like Mampoondia pillai, Pudukottai Dakshinamurthi Pillai and such others, in elevating the status of this instrument and making it an inevitable upa pakka vadya.

### **DHOLAK**

'Dholki' is a North Indian Percussion instrument. It has a 'Vettu Tattu' only inside and the outer portion is completely covered with skin, while the playing sides are connected and tightened with cord of the thread. When this instrument was introduced in the South, by the wandering mendicants, the vidwans adopted it and made some modifications to suit their convenience. Instead of the thread cord, leather stripes were used and on the right side - valandaki - a short 'Vettu tattu' found a place. Another improvement is putting the 'marjana' - black paste - on the right side, just like the Mrudangam, but only as a thin layer. This came to be known as the 'Dholak'. We find some artistes of today apply the 'marjana' for the Toppi of a mrudangam, though this is common only to a Dholak. But such mrudangams sound only like the Pakhawaj of the North or the Dholak of the South - and not how a mrudangam should be.

Dholaks were **first** used in dramas, until the advent of the Tabla, Later, both the Tabla and the Dholak shared equally the stage. The credit of introducing Dholak on the concert dais, goes to Pudu Kottai Nannu Miyan and his brother, Chhote Miyan.

According to the available information, Dholak was introduced by Nannu Miyan, in the vocal concert of Coimbatore Raghava Iyer. Thanjavur Vittal Rao, a disciple of Narayanaswami Appa and originally a mrudangam player, took up the Dholak, on once hearing to the performance of Miyan. Singaram, Madras Venu Chettiar, Balappa, and Ramamrutam were some other prominent Dholak artists. Mrudanga Vidwans like Asvadhathi Ramamurthi, Muthuswami - Dasruand H. Puttachar were equally proficient in Dholak.



## **TABLA**

Tabla is a North Indian percussive instrument like our Mrudangam, but having two separate parts. 'Tabl' is a word used in Persia to denote a percussive instrument. Scholars are of the opinion that the word is of Indian origin and would have crossed the borders to the West, through the traders, religious monks and artistes. History tells us that cultural ties were established between India and various countries, more than thousand years ago.

'Tabla' -- the instrument which is identified with that name today, is said to have taken birth in the early 13th century. Exponents on this art trace the name, Ustad Siddhar Khan, who belonged to the 13th century, as the earliest known Tabla player. When Sadarang introduced the new type of composition -- the khyal-- in the 18th century, Tabla came to be used very much, replacing the Pakhawaj.

As far as South India is concerned, Tabla occupied and dominated the Drama stage, probably in the beginning of the 19th C., as a rhythmic accompaniment. But in Karnataka, Tabla had been greatly used for vocal concerts, as well as, Kathakalakshepams. The sound of the Tabla used in the south, mostly resembled that of the Mrudangam and the 'mootus' are made in such a manner. This type of Tabla is called in the film world as the 'Bass Tabla', whereas, the Tabla used in Hindustani Music is called the 'Top Tabla'. Short spells of Tani Avartta were also not uncommon in the dramas of olden days, because only Music -- that too, Karnataka Music -- was predominant on the stage.

There were more Tabla artistes in Karnataka, when compared to the other South Indian States. We have been handed down legendary names -- Tabla Nanjappa, Rangappa, Srinivasamurthi, Bachanna and such others, who promoted classical music with their Tabla accompaniment. The heritage is continuing,

## **CHENDA - SAMMELA**

Krishnattam, Kathakali and Mohini Attam - the dance forms of Kerala, have in their orchestra, the chenda, a reverberant rhythmic instrument. It has a considerable share in the 'Tayambaka' - layavadya ensemble of that state. Some authors have written that Chanda took its birth, simultaneously with Kathakali. According to history, Kathakali was introduced by the Raja of Kottarakara in the year 1656 - about two years after the debut of Krishnattam. Poet Kambar (11th C) in his 'Ramayana' mentions Chenda : .....

In some other Tamil literature of the 10th C also, we find the term Chenda is used.

From the above references, we are given to understand that Chendai was in existence, even before the 10th C Ad. The instrument is about 2 feet in length and the radius about one foot. The hollow barrel of the wooden piece has 2 sides, covered with skin, though only one side is used for playing, with the help of two sticks.

With a piercing and voluminous sound, it is best suited to produce Veera Rasa.

I need not tell you much about the 'Sammela', because it is an instrument used in the temple rituals of Dakshina Kannada districts. It comprises of two different bowl - shaped pieces and struck with sticks. 'Kirikitti', another sister instrument was very much in vogue, not only in the temples, but also in laya vinyasa, during the deity's procession, combined with the Taval - in Tamil nadu. One of the sticks used is straight, while the other is slightly curved. Sammela is akin to Kirikitti.

'Karanagama' speaks about the benefits one could reap with the help of various musical instruments.

*"Maddalam Vai Sukham Chaiva*

*Talam Sokaharam Bhavet*

*Pataham Pāpaharanam*

*Bheree Pushti vivardhane*

*Dhakka Harshapradā Chaiva*

*Kāhalee cha sukhapradhā*

*Jhallari cha ishtakāmyārthā*

*Kumbhavādyam cha mokshadam".*

Maddalam gives pleasure; tala removes grief; Pataha destroys the sins; Bheree develops sumptuousness; Dhakka produces horripilation; Kahala also grants pleasure; all the desires are fulfilled by Jhallari, while Kumbhavadya - that is - Jaltaranga - gives the greatest of the human goal - the Moksha - liberation.

'Taranga' means 'waves'; 'lahari' also means the same. Today, Taranga and Lahari - the Jalataranga and the Laya Lahari have come together, for the first time and we are all going to enjoy the sweet and scintillating breeze.

My hearty thanks are due to the Percussive Art centre, for having offered me this wonderful opportunity to stand before you, to say a few words and to enjoy the music. I also thank the President, Director and all others, connected with this festival.

Nimmellarigu Nanna Hrutpoorvaka Namaskaragalu.

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## PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE OF PERCUSSIVE ARTS CENTRE

Indian music had identified several percussion instruments which largely accompanied different forms of musical expressions. The Socio-biological necessity of percussions in music, is a fact established of late, but the ancient Indian musicians had identified and immortalised the necessity of percussions at the rim of folk-lore and classical overtones.

The Indian percussion instruments could be segmented and applied in different demographic and social situations such as folk-lore, temple rituals and indoor classical concerts where each form had its own charm and methodology. For instance, Mridanga, Khanjari, Ghata, Morehing (Karnatak) and Pakhwaj, Tabla (Hindustain) are exclusively used in indoor classical concerts, whereas Sammela, Chande, Dolu (Thavi) and Cymbal (Thala) are representative of the folk-lore and temple ritualistic forms. As for the utility, the folklore forms largely remained out of the realm of the classical forms, for they neither had an identifiable shruthi nor a definite set-pattern. Nevertheless the folk-lore sound patterns had a organic amalgamation with the culture that had sustained it and therefore, till recently very few attempts were made to synthesise these two forms of percussion instruments. *Till recently, percussions were considered only for supportive role, and only recently it is recognised that percussions have an independent identity of their own,* as in Western emsembles.

This presentation is under a project of "Professional groups for specified performing arts covering rare forms and other traditional forms for music ensembles-orchestrations". This PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE is planned for presentation cum Video taping/audio-taping for preservation and possible analysis for further innovations and development of these thematic expressions. This is an attempt of blending these hitherto different forms of percussion where the charm of folklore is not dispensed at the cost of tone value. To drive this idea home, table tarang had been included in the ensemble where rhythm and melody are given the requisite priorities. For the first time, Gethu Vadya, an ancient stringed percussion instrument is included, unlike others Gethu Vadya is the only stringed percussion instrument, a shruthi vadya and a taala vadya. The other instruments used differ in sound, their timbre, texture, and attempt to strike a balance between classical norms and in giving an independent identity to these instruments. The artistes conditioned mainly to classical music are *attempting to look beyond into new rhythmic areas and innovations-adventures*. This earnestness had to match with proper thought and planning and also create an awareness into the potentialities and also limitations of the different instruments.

Future attempts include innovations into electronic instruments and computerised music etc. Some instruments practiced by other backward community members are also put to use.

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS of Art Centre:-

1. Great Laya Vaadyakaaraas of Karnatak Music by B. M. Sundaram  
(Talk on 2.6.1985), Released on 1.6.86 Rs. 4/-
2. The Art & Science of Tabla by Pandit Nikhil Ghosh (Demo on 31.5.87, Out of print)
3. Kannada Saashityadalli Talavadyagala Ullekha by  
B. V. K. Sastry (Talk on 5.9.95), released on 1.6.87 Rs. 4/-
4. Taala Sangraha (Compliation of data for over 1200 Taalas)  
by B. M. Sundaram, released on 31.7.87 Rs. 80/-
5. Psychology of Laya Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao (Lecture on 22.9.86) Rs. 5/-
6. Taala Dasa Praanaas by Dr. S. R. Janakiraman (Lecture on 31.5.82) Rs. 10/-
7. Lecture Jewel Casket, Vol 1 Edited by Bangalore K. Venkataram, Lectures  
by T. Sankaran (30.5.82), V. K. Narayana Menon (29.5.83),  
Ashok Ranade (27.5.84), Pandit Nikhil Ghosh (1.6.86), released on 4.6.88 Rs. 10/-
8. Chandassinalli Taala Layagalu by Prof. M. Rajagopalcharya,  
(Talk on 4.9.88) released on 4.9.88 Rs. 5/-
9. Devotional Music by Late P. V. Rao released on 30.5.89 Rs. 4/-
10. Pallavigalu, Key note address by R. K. Srikatnan on 1.1.88 released on 31.5.89 Rs. 5/-
11. Kanakadaasara Keerthanegalu, (Study Circle in 1989 by R. K. Srikantan,  
8 krithis in notation released on 28.5.90) Rs. 10/-
12. Yakshganadalli Talagalu by Hothota Manjunatha Bhatta (Talk on 19.9.89)  
(Released on 30.5.90) Rs. 4/-
13. Mysore Veena Parampare by Dr. V. Doreswamy Iyengar (Talk on 14.10.87)  
(Released on 31.5.90) Rs. 5/-
14. Kancheepuram Nayana Pillai, Monograph by B. M. Sundaram, (Released on 31.5.90) Rs. 10/-
15. Inaugural Address of Talavadyothsav '89 by Dr. Raja Ramanna on 27.5.89,  
(Released on 8.7.90) Rs. 5/-
16. Manipuri Tala System by Guru Bipin Singh (Talk on 29.5.89) (Released on 26.5.91) Rs. 5/-
17. Comparative study of Talas in Hindustani and Karnatak systems by  
T. V. Gopalkrishnan, (Talk on 29.5.90) (Released on 31.5.91) Rs. 5/-
18. Decennial celebrations (Lecture session on 31.5.92) (Prof. R. Visveswaran,  
Dr. Surochana Rajendran, B. M. Sundaram, K. S. Mahadevan) Rs. 10/-
19. Problems of mutual appreciation of Hindustain & Karnatak Music -  
(Proceedings of seminar on 27.5.93) Rs. 10/-
20. World Music by Prof. R. Visveswaran (released on 25.5.95) Rs. 10/-
21. Monograph on Needamangalam Meenakshi Sundaram Pallai (released on 28.5.95) Rs. 5/-
22. Monograph on Tanjore Vaidyanatha Iyer (released on 29.5.95) Rs. 7/-