

Lakshmi Devnath serves up a breathless narration on the life of the legendary violin maestro Lalgudi G. Jayaraman. It is like a Carnatic music *Kutcheri* alternating between Kalpita and Manodharma. As Devnath explains in the book, Carnatic music consists of two main modes. Kalpita and Manodharma. While Kalpita is the name given to the already composed according to the Raga characteristics, Manodharma is the creation of the performer's imagination subject to the rules of the Raga. The book takes up both modes in equal measure. While there is a biographical sketch based on interviews in a narration mode, there is also the storytelling mode adopted by the author. It gives a tantalizing mix of anecdotal and narrative styles.

Lalgudi Jayaraman himself says, 'This biography records not just the pleasant and happy moments but has also gone into some of the challenging times, the dilemmas I have had and my disagreements with some people at various points in my career. I felt that the so called "personal" or the "Not so pleasant" incidents are as much part of the story as the celebratory ones.' And he welcomes it. That the book got ready a couple of days after his passing away adds to the poignancy. Lakshmi Devnath has interviewed hundreds of people over hundreds of hours, travelled to Lalgudi to feel the air of the maestro's birthplace and pored over several hundred reviews and articles to get this sketch done.

Pandit Ravi Shankar, the Sitar Maestro who has written the foreword also passed away

AN INCURABLE ROMANTIC: THE MUSICAL JOURNEY OF LALGUDI JAYARAMAN

By Lakshmi Devnath
HarperCollins India, 2013, pp. 435 with an audio CD, ₹599.00

before the book was launched. Ravi Shankar says he was blown away by the biography.

This is the story of a man who lived and loved music, of a genius, supremely talented. The title is intriguing. Lalgudi Jayaraman was known to be very strict and only into his music. Lakshmi Devnath says that Lalgudi Jayaraman constantly reiterated that the violin was his *Kathali*, the love of his life. The story brings alive the beauty of that relationship told in such a romantic manner that one cannot but fall in love with the man and his music. To help fall deeper in love, there is the audio CD attached to the book which lets you savour the magnificence of Lalgudi's music as it evolved over time. This lingers in the mind for a long time. That the story of each piece of music is told in the book makes the listening even more delectable.

A Carnatic Music Kutcheri

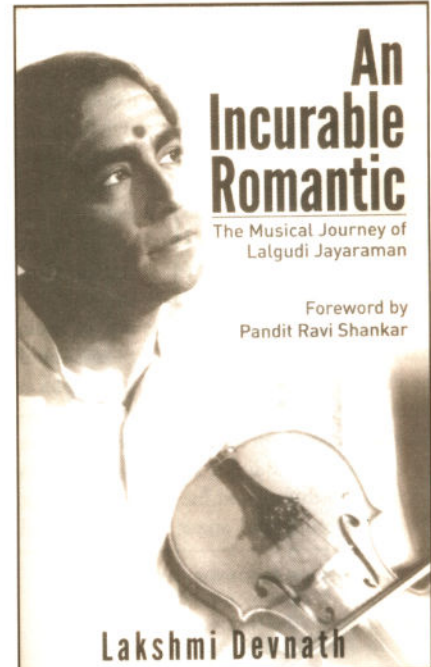
V.R. Devika

Lakshmi Devnath has done intensive research and her awe and admiration are very evident in the book. This is an authorized biography with complete participation from the family and Lalgudi Jayaraman himself, beginning with the touching portrayal of the maestro's touching attachment to his violin. From Lalgudi Rama Iyer, great-grandfather and a direct disciple of Thyagaraja to Valadi Radhakrishna Iyer (one of the first in the field of violin accompaniment in Carnatic Music) to his father Gopala Iyer, the direct connection to the Trinity of Carnatic music is established. Lakshmi Devnath spends enough pages on these individuals and on the musical lineage who directly and indirectly shaped the musician in order to set the base to person and musician in Lalgudi Jayaraman. Under the strict (as one expects of the old Gurukula style of teaching) guidance and tutelage of his father and guru Gopala Iyer, Jayaraman's learning was fast and meticulous. There was no place for silly games or other entertainment in the pursuit of perfection. Gopala Iyer continued to 'fine tune' his son's music, even after he had made a name for himself. He removed his son from school when a teacher beat Jayaraman on his palm and got tutors at home with music being the predominant learning day and night.

GNB, the superstar of Carnatic music began to ask for Jayaraman to accompany him and this provided a great opportunity for growth in the field. There are interesting anecdotes and a snippet of Lalgudi accompanying the great GNB are alluring. Other episodes give us an idea how Lalgudi grew up accompanying several great musical stalwarts of the era.

Lalgudi became a sought after accompanist and solo artist. Later his sister and children also started playing the violin along with him. Along with great accolades, he also courted controversy aplenty. Each of these is discussed in detail in the book. There is the famous tussle with critics like SVK and Subbudu, with Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and the Music Academy, the many life-long friendships and some that disentangled too are all told in detail.

The creative Lalgudi who has given the music world an immense number of compositions is brought out in great detail. His interactions with dancers is a special treat in



this book. But the book also reminds us that it has been written keeping in mind that Lalgudi Jayaraman himself would be reading it. As an admirer and as the mother of a disciple of his, Lakshmi Devnath has tried to be as objective as these limitations would allow.

Interesting titles to the chapters—'The Other Strand in the Hoary Lineage', 'Unheard Voice', 'Sixteen and in Love', 'Shades Bright and Dull', 'Clouds', 'Pollination'—kindle interest. The Carnatic music lover who has a little knowledge of this world would enjoy this book more than others. Also interesting are small excerpts from Lalgudi's diaries over the years that reveal the mind of a man totally focussed on his music and the high place he gave it in his life. There is also an interesting article on the place of violin in Carnatic music. This is a complete book, one that will become a precious treasure for the Carnatic music lover. It does however keep you restless and wishing there was more of the man Lalgudi with Lalgudi the musician.

V.R. Devika, a well known story-teller and cultural organizer, is the founder of The Aseema Trust for traditional performing arts in education and Mahatma Gandhi for today. Her PhD is on Gandhian communications for transformation at the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras, Chennai.