



CANARA UNION NEWSLETTER

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July 2026



Vidushi Lalith J. Rao

The voice falls silent

The raaga echoes forever

Programmes for the Month of July 2026 - Venue: Shri Chitrapur Math, 15th Cross, Malleswaram

Parijnan Kala Samarpanam presents:

Sunday 12th 10.00 a.m.

Workshop by Lakshmi Rao on Creative Visualization

Saturday 18th 05.00 p.m.

Santoor Recital by Shri Deepak Ullal

APPEAL

Canara Union appeals to all its Members who are over 80 years to please pay Rs.150/- per annum (April-March) for the Hard Copy of CUNL (Canara Union Newsletter). Method of payment is detailed on Page 2 of the CUNL. Those members who have paid may ignore this message.

NEW ANNOUNCEMENT

THOSE MEMBERS WHO HAVE NOT PAID THEIR ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2024-25 MAY NOTE THAT THEIR MEMBERSHIP STANDS CANCELLED.

MEMBERS WHOSE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2025-2026 IS STILL DUE, YOU ARE REQUESTED TO PAY IMMEDIATELY. SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2026-27 MAY BE PAID AT THE EARLIEST.

Annual Membership Subscription Fees

All Members shall pay in advance their Annual Subscription for the period 1st April to 31st March of the financial year. For ease of payment, we have introduced **UPI** and the QR code which is published hereunder.

Annual subscription is as follows. Pay by Cash/Cheque/NEFT/UPI. Contact office 080-23342625 if you need clarification.

60 years & below Rs.300/- + GST 18% Rs.54/- = Rs.354/- per annum

Above 60 years Rs.150/- + GST 18% Rs.27/- = Rs.177/- per annum

Over 80 years: No subscription

For Hard Copy of CUNL (Canara Union Newsletter) please add Rs.150/- per annum (April-March) towards postage/delivery charges. You can add to Annual Membership Subscription.

Pay: "The Canara Union", S/B Acct No.10600 31300 00822,
SVC Co-Operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060.

If paid by NEFT, please email NEFT reference number to canaraunion@gmail.com or Whatsapp to 8310857255 with your name. If paying by UPI, please send screenshot with name and details of payment.



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A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

We dedicate this issue to Vidushi Lalith J Rao, with sadness as well as with great pride in her. It is difficult to believe that she has left us. May she rest in the peace that passes all understanding.

In planning this issue, which we are privileged to do, we wanted to draw on the many ways in which we knew her. I thank Chitra Saletore who has so kindly and consultatively fielded the contributions from Lalith's son Sanjeev, from her amazing students, co-musicians, friends and others who knew her. She and Meera Philar have put this issue together. I thank Jayavanth for guiding us.



In the midst of her dazzling presence in music, performance as well as teaching, Sanjeev wanted to remember Lalith as the very special mother and grandmother she was. She was six months older than me, and I often remember her as a very little girl, spritely and acing us poor boys at all events. I have written about this, my loving contribution.



I also want to remember how she loved children of all ages and could converse naturally with them. Here she is with my granddaughter Mira.

In the many ways in which you connected with us, we felt your love, Lalith. We will miss you so much.



In this issue, we also have a profile of the legend, the unforgettable Suman Kalyanpur, by Anand Nagarkar.



Our Chaturbuja Seva Group (Antim Yatra Seva group) has, as always, risen to the occasion with alertness and compassion. No praise is enough for the selfless work they do. That their work is completely voluntary and honorary is sometimes not known to some bereaved families and there are those who have so kindly offered to pay for their services. The seva group has always courteously declined this.

It occurs to us, however, that such donations could, when offered, perhaps flow into a fund which will help those who have difficulty in meeting the *antim yatra* expenses of their loved ones. For example, the hearse, *purohit* expenses, transport, cremation and *vaikunt* rites. Elsewhere in this issue, we have indicated a Welfare Fund to which donations in this category will be gratefully received. The seva group would follow procedures to observe and recommend suitably.

PRAKASH AROOR

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Canara Union is happy to announce their new Website **www.canaraunion.com** which has gone live with immediate effect. We look forward to your thoughts and feedback, if any.

PRINT COPIES and E-ISSUES



We thank those who have written/telephoned to indicate their preference of the CUNL.

Members who haven't contacted us and who prefer e-issues please let us know your preference. And those members who have opted for e-issues but are still getting hard copies of CUNL, please let the office know. Please write to canaraunion@gmail.com with a copy to meeraphilar79@gmail.com or phone the Canara Union at 080 23342625. Thank you.

PS: Members who have not paid Rs.150/- towards postage of the CUNL for the year, are requested to pay - Cash or Cheque favouring "The Canara Union". If transferring by NEFT, please transfer to "The Canara Union" S/B Acct No.10600 31300 00822, SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060. Please send us a copy of NEFT transfer and your name.

You can also pay by UPI. See details on page 2

NOTE: We are updating our Membership List. Request all Members to send us your latest address, phone numbers (Landline and Mobile) and email IDs to canaraunion@gmail.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to the following for the donations made by them towards:

Canara Union Monthly Distress Relief Fund

A Well-Wisher

Rs. 12,000.00

Canara Union Student Scholarship Fund

A Well-Wisher

Rs.1,00,000.00

Canara Union Monthly Distress Relief Fund

Shri Kishore R Udiaver

(In memory of mother Smt. Shashi Udiaver)

Rs. 50,000.00

PS: We request all donors to provide us with a letter and a copy of PAN Card and Address Proof at the time of donation, which is a requirement by the IT Department.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

The medical equipment donated by members to Canara Union are meant to help patients tide over their immediate requirement for a period not exceeding 3 months. If required beyond 3 months, members are requested to make alternative arrangements. (This will help equipment availability to others in need.) All requests need to be made either by email or letters. Henceforth, a nominal refundable deposit will be collected, as follows:

Walking Stick: Rs.100/- Walker: Rs.250/- Wheelchair: Rs.500/- Hospital Bed: Rs.1000/Rs.2000.

RENEWED APPEAL FOR MONTHLY DISTRESS RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Dear Friends, Canara Union continues to assist the badly affected families of Covid-19 every month. Your continued support and help towards this scheme as long as possible would be appreciated. You may make payments either by cheque or bank transfer to the account specified below. For any clarification you may contact or write to us at:

Prakash Aroor, President Mobile: 9901560602

Meera Philar, Hon. Secretary Mobile: 9844022713

Harish Sujir, Hon. Treasurer Mobile: 9845055567

Email: canaraunion@gmail.com

Payments can be made to THE CANARA UNION WELFARE FUND either by cheque or by Net Banking transfer to the following:

The Canara Union Welfare Fund

Savings Bank A/C No.:10980 31300 05454

SVC Co-Operative Bank Ltd. Vidyamandir Branch, Malleswaram, Bangalore 560 003

IFC Code: SVCB0000098

VERY VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING DONATIONS

All Members/Donors wanting to make donations, please see one full page ANNOUNCEMENT in the CUNL. You may pay either by CHEQUE OR NEFT. Follow it up with a letter or fill details in a copy of the Announcement Sheet along with a copy of your PAN Card and Proof of Address. If sending by NEFT, please send to respective account (Name and No.) of your donation choice as mentioned in the Announcement Sheet. For any clarification, please email canaraunion@gmail.com or WhatsApp or call Meera Philar at 9844022713 or Harish Sujir at 9845055567.

DONATION

From:
Name: Sri / Smt. _____
Address: _____

Date: _____
PAN NO : _____

To,
The President
The Canara Union (Regd.)
Bangalore-560003

Sir,

Sub: Donation towards Endowment Fund/s

I wish to donate a total sum of Rs. _____ (in words: Rupees _____)
towards The Canara Union Endowment Funds detailed below:

Type of Donation	Amount	Bank Details
Building Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) , Account No. 34050851518 State Bank of India, IFSC SBIN0007080
Distress Relief Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) Distress Relief Fund Account No 10600 31300 18707 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060
Medical Relief Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) Medical Relief Fund Account No 10600 31300 18706 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060
Students Scholarship Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) Students Scholarship Fund Account No 10600 31300 18705 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060
Cultural Endowment Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) Cultural Endowment Fund Account No 10600 31300 18703 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060
Sports Endowment Fund		The Canara Union(Regd) Sports Endowment Fund Account No 10600 31300 18704 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000060
Monthly Distress Relief Fund		The Canara Union Welfare Fund Account No 10980 31300 05454 SVC Co-operative Bank Ltd., IFSC Code: SVCB0000098

I am enclosing the cheque for the above said amount / remitted by NEFT/RTGS, as detailed below:

Cheque No..... Dateddrawn on Bank.....,Branch.....
NEFT / RTGS Details Remittance made Dated..... Bank / Branch.....

The amount of donation [tick any one]

- ☐ 1.) Is to be kept as a Corpus Fund & interest earned thereon is to be used for disbursement.
- ☐ 2.) Is to be distributed in the next occasion for disbursement as decided by the Canara Union.

The donation is given in the memory of:

I have attached a copy of my PAN CARD & PROOF OF ADDRESS.

Regards,

Signature
Phone No:

THE YOGA OF PERFECTION: AN ODE TO MY MOTHER

SANJEEV RAO

The world has and will rightly continue to celebrate my mother for her music. As an exponent, a guru and a role model, her legacy truly speaks for itself. As a guardian of a tradition, she was a symbol of devotion to her art.



However, in this tribute, I wish to share something only a son can. A personal glimpse of the wholeness she embodied as both a mother and a grandmother. Something that reveals the woman behind the music and the person she truly was.

In our tradition we say Matru Devo Bhava, honour the mother as divine. She was my first teacher and refuge. She alone knew me for the nine months before the world started giving me multiple identities. She always saw in me more than I could see in myself. She pushed me to attempt things I never thought possible, and she was always there to pick me up when I fell. That safety net gave me the wings to fly.

Growing up, the weight of her perfectionism was not always easy to carry as the only child of

an only child. Her standards were high and she lived by them completely, without compromise. Over time I realised that what initially felt like a burden was in fact unconditional love. She refused to be casual because she could only love fully. In that way she practised her dharma through an unwavering commitment to excellence. She was, in every role she embraced, the Yoga of Perfection. For her, perfection was simply the highest form of sincerity. It was a way of honouring life and the gifts she had been given.

As a mother, she inspired me by embodying three profound principles: Courage, Justice, and Honesty.

Her courage was defined by bold choices. Giving up an aspirational career to be present for family while following her childhood passion; proving that a vocation is not diminished when love is placed at the centre. Changing school systems mid-year for me to ensure that we remained united; choosing our emotional security over the convenience of what society would have suggested. Selling the family home to anticipate the future and avoid being a burden; a selfless act of foresight that ensured her care would never become a burden. A wonderful lesson in choosing the higher good above immediate comfort.

Her sense of justice became evident when I began to find my own destiny. I made decisions that were unconventional, choices that shifted away from her own line of thinking, and at times she found them a little hard to comprehend. Yet, she always took the time to understand the

rationale behind my path, and once she did, she always fully acknowledged and supported it. That trust gave me both roots and freedom.

Her honesty made our home a place of true conversation. We spoke openly about doubts, mistakes, failures, fears, life and even death. That rare openness gave me firm grounding and the space to become myself. It was this honesty that gave me a precious gift during her last years. Though I lived far away, I was able to bridge the distance and spend many months by her side. Those months were an extended, intimate conversation in which we spoke deeply and left very little unsaid.

Watching her as a grandmother was another privilege. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and this is exactly what we got when we moved back to India to live as a joint family in that beautiful home called Gitanjali. The doting grandparents, grand aunt Saras, whose radiant and fortifying love nourished our lives, and the Chitrapur Saraswat community, extended family and elders who sustained our traditions. This is when I truly saw her again manifesting this Yoga of Perfection through devotion and presence. Over those eleven years she made the grandchildren a priority:

singing lullabies, sharing family stories, listening without hurry, and providing a steady emotional anchor in their daily lives. Even after the grandchildren left home for their own lives abroad, they rarely missed a weekend to call, and they often returned for extended visits. Distance did not diminish that bond.

Manou inherited her deep sense of *aya* and the inner discipline that now shapes his work. He has pursued his own musical path with excellence, collaborating and performing internationally from a young age to become an established musician. Leela drew on that same resource and scientific orientation to reach Cambridge. In 2025, she completed an internship at the Indian Institute of Science exactly sixty years to the day after my mother graduated from that same prestigious institution. In them she saw her two areas of virtuosity, music and academic excellence, reflected and renewed, an inheritance that will shape how they meet the world.

If there is one thing I can hold onto, it is that she was a woman of steel, courageous, resilient, and unyielding. She possessed a perseverance that carried her through things that would have broken others. Yet, as a close



friend shared recently, within that strength she truly carried *karuna*, a quiet, steady compassion shown in small, faithful acts. A presence that made people feel truly seen, cared for and in whom they could truly confide.

I would not be complete without naming the two *karma yogis* who made this possible. Firstly, my father, my role model. He lived beside her with calm steadiness, showing how love is practised through patience, adjustment and daily devotion. Without complaint, he managed burdens and offered the unflinching support that allowed her to pursue excellence. Then my wife Claire, my anchor. Her contribution to society stands on its own, yet in our family she gave strength and stillness without seeking any recognition. Their quiet labour and loyalty held the ground to ensure that the mother and child relationship could flourish.

I wish to conclude with a small phrase from the Bhagavad Gita: “*Na jayate mriyate va*

kadachin”. The Self is never born and never dies, a reminder that while the body passes, her essential presence is not diminished.

To the world, her music was extraordinary and inspirational. It will be faithfully continued by her devoted and ever loyal students, who have achieved exceptional artistry and will preserve the *Agra gayaki*.

To her grandchildren she has left that quiet inheritance and a legacy of influence through values they will use to carve their own destiny.

As for me, she lives on in that secret space deep within the heart known as *hridaya*. In that inner home of truth and memory, she will remain an eternal presence and continues to guide and shape who I am.

In this life, I will always be grateful to have been her child.



LALITH J. RAO (NAYAMPALLI): 1942 – 2026

KISHORE RAO

We lost the doyenne of the *Agra gharana*, Vidushi Lalith J. Rao (Nayampalli), on 3rd June 2026. She was a tremendously accomplished artiste who dared to enter into a male bastion and make such a success of it that she was considered as serious competition to the most well-known Ustads of the *gharana*. So much has been written and spoken about her beautiful music that I feel that the rest of her very well rounded and complete personality

have been overlooked. Believe me when I say that these overlooked accomplishments are perhaps as much to be appreciated as her music and I would like to share some of these with you.

She did her Engineering graduation and post-graduation from some of the top universities – Electronics and Communications from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore,

and then her post-graduation in Biomedical Engineering from the New Brunswick University in Canada.

During her school and university days she shone in another field. She was an ace athlete. She rose to be the captain of the Karnataka State Basketball team and the record she held in javelin throw stood unchallenged for seventeen years.

She and Jayavanth were an extremely traditional couple. Whenever there was a birthday or an anniversary among their friends, they would make it a point to invite them home, along with the entire group, and do the traditional *aarti* for the couple. Among Lalith's abiding interests was Vedanta and they both attended lectures on such subjects regularly. Practically on a daily basis they listened to recorded Vedanta lectures. More than anything else they were ardent followers of our own Revered H.H. Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji and of the Shri Chitrapur Math; on every one of His visits to Bangalore, they would faithfully perform Paduka Puja.

Lalith was generous to a fault. She only had to hear anybody say that they liked something and she was sure to send for it and present it to



the person. It had become an annual tradition that New Year's Eve would be celebrated at their place among their friends' group – no matter the amount of labour that went into organising it, hosting it, and clearing up afterwards. Many are the friends who will remember her personally getting food for them in hospital if they happened to be unwell.

To Lalith her family was the central focus of her life. It was this very closely knit unit that got her entire attention. All her other activities revolved around it – although Sanjeev, her son, Claire her daughter-in-law and their two children Manou and Leila, live overseas. Perhaps her great satisfaction would be that Manou has taken after her in music, although it is a different genre – he is a leading electric guitarist on the international stage, popular in the field of Rock music. Leila will soon be graduating in neurosciences from Cambridge University.

Lalith and Jayavanth were members of a small group who enjoyed domestic and international travel together. This started twenty years ago with a trip to Egypt in 2006. Numbers ranged from twelve or thirteen in their travels to Egypt, Turkey and Bhutan but finally settled at six. Lalith was the master planner for most of these trips. The last of these trips in May 2018 was very methodically planned by Lalith to cover Tuscany in Italy plus Slovenia and Croatia. The notes she made, with copies for each of the six of us, could easily pass as written by a professional tour guide. Very unfortunately, two days before the trip she fell ill and could not travel. After much discussion, she very sportingly persuaded the five of us to travel without her. During the trip she would keep in touch with us, and many times give us clarifications on what to do. Such was the detail she planned.

As a person she was a very open, uncomplicated, fun-loving individual. She had a fine sense of humour and enjoyed being with friends. In their many travels the group always made it a point to meet for an hour or so every evening before dinner and these were fun evenings. A lot was discussed during this time and among the mutual leg pulling that went on, she took a very active part. She had a ready, hearty, tinkling laugh which had the effect of relaxing the entire group.

For all her accomplishments and achievements, Lalith could easily have turned into a proud, stand-offish person. She was anything but that. To coin an expression – she was a ‘both-feet-on-the-ground’, friendly, caring, giving individual. A word on her ‘giving’

nature – on my wife’s birthday she prepared a pen drive consisting of about thirty or forty lectures on Vedanta and presented it to her. Please think of the labour involved in that exercise because the transfer had to be in real time. She did it enthusiastically, happily and with much love.

All the qualities I have talked about being combined in one individual are a rare phenomenon. Add to this the fact that she was an outstanding, world class musician is a rare combination. But then, that was Lalith J. Rao – one of a kind and difficult to equal.

May her soul attain Sadgati and may our Revered Swamiji give her family the strength to accept the loss.



LALITH AUNTY: MY GURU, MY MOTHER, MY MA SARASWATI

VIDUSHI BHARATI PRATHAP

I remember the first time I spoke to Lalith aunty. I nervously dialled her number and my pulse raced when my call was answered.

It was at a time when I was groping in the dark after the passing away of my Guru. I desperately wanted to continue my pursuit of music and was relieved when Mrs. Kanaka Murthy, a great sculptor of our state, gave me Lalithji’s number and asked me to contact her for lessons.

When I introduced myself as a disciple of Pt. Rama Rao V. Naik and requested her to take me on as a student, Lalith aunty’s reply was direct and to the point.

She said, “Bharathi, I haven’t heard you or heard of you and I can’t take all of Rama Rao’s students as I am recovering from a voice problem. Come and see me on the 13th at 5 pm.”

My heart sank as the call disconnected. Was I being too optimistic?

I need not have feared at all, for it was the beginning of a beautiful relationship that lasted for more than twenty-five years.

13 November 2000 was my first meeting with Lalith aunty at Gitanjali. It is a day that will be etched forever in my memory.



Lalith aunty greeted me with a warm, comforting smile that settled me down immediately. She brought the *tanpura*, tuned it to my pitch and switched on the Radel tabla machine. My “entrance test” was about to begin! I sang Bhimpalas taught by Rama Rao ji for about fifteen to twenty minutes.

Once I finished, I waited anxiously for her reaction.

Lalith aunty said, “I will teach you but will not accept any Gurudakshina. You should practise well and sing well, that is how I will be paying my tribute to my Gurus.”

I stared at her, not believing what I had just heard. It was surreal. It is said the Guru appears when the *shishya* is ready. She was truly sent by God in my case. it was a dream come true!

We started that very evening with Raag Bageshree. I was in a state of bliss as the *raga*

alap went on for more than an hour, before Lalith aunty said that we would stop for the day. She asked me to come once a week for classes, which gradually turned into alternate days.

Thus started my musical journey with Lalith aunty which went on uninterrupted right till 2 June 2026, just a day before she left us. A journey in which I found not just my Guru, but another mother as well.

Lalith aunty’s home became my second home; she and Uncle became my second parents. It was as if she had a magic wand that provided the right channel for my scattered talent. Every class with her was a high and left me euphoric. I used to have some favourite ragas, but soon I realised that whichever *raga* she began to teach ended up as my favourite! That speaks volumes of her calibre as a great Guru. She taught me not just music, but also to manage family and music equally well, so that the two complimented each other beautifully. Any respite from my daily chores became my practise time, and every time I sang with her filled me with a wondrous joy.

Lalith aunty would always encourage me to take up any project in music, saying they will be good learning experiences. Be it singing title songs for tele-serials, devotional music recordings and programs, or even chorus for film music – nothing was taboo. There was complete transparency between us which made the bond stronger.

In her own performances, Lalith aunty’s remarkable stage presence, rapport with the accompanying artists, respect for the organisers, and instant connection with the audience made each and every event so memorable. The way she prepared so

meticulously, having many rehearsals with the accompanying artists, would leave her in complete confidence and readiness to execute the performance to perfection. It was a great learning experience indeed travelling with her to places both in India and abroad for her concerts and lecture-demonstrations.

As her disciples, while we were blissfully enjoying this journey of learning and rehearsing for the brilliant thematic presentations which she conceived and directed, little did we realise that she was moulding us to become performing artists. The various *ragas*, compositions, *taals*, and genres that we were learning along with systematic and dedicated practice made each of us grow with confidence. Aunty and Uncle seated in the front row in our concerts gave us immense strength to give our best and present this divine music on diverse prestigious platforms. She was always encouraging us to continuously strive to better our singing. “Don’t settle down on a plateau, you have to see how you can soar higher.”

Rejoicing in the success of each of her students, be it in music or on the personal front, was heartfelt by Aunty and Uncle. Our group was called Guru Bandhus (GBs), and she was always the first to announce any achievement by any of us on this group with immense pride and joy! Celebrating our milestone birthdays and wedding anniversaries by doing *Arati* was a tradition. Apart from this, expressing wholehearted appreciation of any other musician/friend on their achievements, either through a phone call, or with a hand-written note, was something she would do on priority. She was generous in her encouragement to one and all.

Even in her last days, Lalith aunty was immersed in music. She would listen with Uncle to all the recordings of a particular *raga* from their vast collection, and make notes highlighting certain aspects of each of them, which she thought we could imbibe. Such was her large heartedness that even in the midst of her own troubles, she constantly thought of us. On a lighter note, I would always tell her, “Aunty, you’re our ONIDA: Neighbour’s envy, owners’ pride!”

She remained an eager student till the end. Gracefully battling the difficult IBS, she found solace in music and chants. “Come and sing every week. At least I will be distracted from the discomfort for that period of time,” she would say.

To me personally, it was the Goddess herself who descended to lift me and gently take me on the path of this divine music. She held my hands when I stumbled, patted my back for my achievements, and directed my vision to the vast horizon to keep me grounded. To someone who viewed classical music as just a hobby before coming under her wing, I humbly owe all that I have been able to achieve to my dearest Lalith aunty. She will come alive with every note that I sing, and her strong presence will continue to guide me in the Nada Sagara.

I offer my sincere pranams to her: my Guru, my mother, my Ma Saraswati.

ONE LIFETIME NOT ENOUGH TO ABSORB EVERYTHING SHE GAVE US...

MANOHAR PATWARDHAN

There are some losses for which words feel painfully inadequate. No matter how much one writes, speaks, or remembers, it never quite captures what a person truly means to us

For me, that person was my Guru, Vidushi Lalith J. Rao.

My journey with Lalith Auntie began in 2012. I was about to begin college and my Guru, Vidushi Shantha Poti, who was Auntie's contemporary and a dear friend, took me to her beautiful Malleswaram home, Geetanjali, and requested her to teach me.

I still remember that afternoon as though it happened yesterday. I sang whatever little I knew. When I finished, Jayavanth Uncle, who was in the bedroom, walked out and started applauding. Both Auntie and Uncle encouraged me warmly and spoke to me with such kindness that all my nervousness disappeared. A month later, I returned with my parents, and through a traditional Gandabandh ceremony, Auntie formally accepted me as her disciple.

Looking back today, I realize that I did not merely find a music teacher that day. I found a guide, a mentor, a philosopher, a critic, a well-wisher, and above all, a motherly presence who would profoundly shape the course of my life.

What began as one class a week gradually became two, three, and sometimes every day of the week. Music was always at the centre of our relationship, but what she taught me extended far beyond music. She influenced the way I think, the way I speak, the way I observe beauty, the way I carry myself, and the way I approach life.

Over 14 years, countless memories were created. There were days when she praised me generously and made me feel capable of achieving anything. There were also days when she scolded me sharply for not putting in enough effort. But even in those moments, there was never anger without affection. She demanded excellence because she genuinely believed her students were capable of more than they believed themselves to be. And the moment we succeeded, nobody was happier than she was.

I still remember her calling me on the first day of my job and telling me, "Now you must learn to balance both music and work." She never wanted me to choose one over the other. She



wanted me to excel in both. Every promotion, every career milestone, every achievement brought her immense joy. She would proudly speak about it to her friends and acquaintances as though it were a personal achievement. That was my Auntie.

And about concerts?!? What audiences saw on stage was often the result of countless hours of thought, planning, discussions, corrections, and preparation that happened behind the scenes. Auntie would go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that I was ready. She would carefully think through every detail - what to sing, what not to sing, how to present a *raga*, what *bandishes* to sing, etc. If there is anything worthwhile in my music today, it is because of her.

Last Thursday, on the 28th of May, I went for what unknowingly became my final lesson with her. We spent time discussing a concert that I am scheduled to perform in August. As always, she had clear ideas and plans. She guided me about the repertoire, presentation, and preparation. I remember her, almost casually, telling me something that has been echoing in my mind ever since:

“You have to start growing individually as an artist now. You cannot keep depending on me for every decision.”

At the time, it sounded like advice.

Today, it feels like a blessing. A final instruction. A final lesson.

As I was leaving, she was resting on her bed. I held her hand and gently placed it on my forehead. She smiled and said, “Come next week.”

Little did I know that there would be no next week. Little did I know that after 14 years, that would be my final lesson with her. The final time

I would hear her voice in person. The final time I would receive her guidance. The final time I would bow before her.

My last interaction with her was on the 1st of June - Monday, asking whether I would be coming on Thursday for class.

Over the last two days, I have found myself scrolling through years of WhatsApp conversations with her. Thousands of messages. Discussions about music. Recordings. Concert plans. Corrections. Encouragement. Humour. Affection. Life advice.

Every message opens a door to another memory. Every memory reminds me of how deeply she touched my life.

People often say that a Guru teaches knowledge. Auntie did much more than that. She taught us how to live with dignity, how to pursue excellence without arrogance, how to remain grounded despite achievements, how to preserve tradition while remaining open-minded, and how to dedicate oneself completely to an art form.

I genuinely feel that one lifetime is not enough to absorb everything she gave us.

When I look back at my life, I often feel that God has been extraordinarily kind to me. Far kinder than I deserve. Because among the many blessings I have received, one of the greatest was the privilege of being accepted as a disciple by Vidushi Lalith J. Rao. For that, I will remain grateful for the rest of my life.

I cannot speak about Auntie without speaking about Jayavanth Uncle. Over the last 14 years, I had the privilege of witnessing not just a great musician, but one of the most beautiful partnerships I have ever seen.

Behind every concert, every student, every achievement, every accolade, and every milestone in Auntie's journey stands Uncle - quietly, selflessly, and unwaveringly supporting her. Whether it was receiving students at home, making us feel welcome, making us his famous espresso coffee (and Auntie getting mad at us since we would ditch her tea to have Uncle's coffee), taking care of countless things behind the scenes, or simply being a constant pillar of strength, his presence is always there.

In her final years, when health became a challenge, his devotion became even more evident. The care, patience, dignity, and love with which he looked after Auntie was something truly extraordinary to witness.

Even in this moment of unimaginable loss, the grace, strength, and positivity with which he has faced everything has left me in awe.

People often speak of ideal couples. We use the phrase casually. But if anyone ever asks me what an ideal partnership looks like, I will always think of Lalith Auntie and Jayavanth Uncle.

Their companionship was built on love, mutual respect, admiration, friendship, sacrifice, humour, and an unwavering commitment to one another. To watch them together was to understand what true partnership really means. I genuinely believe that people like them are rare. Limited edition, as they say.

Auntie's departure is undoubtedly a monumental loss. An era has come to an end. Yet, deep within my heart, I cannot bring myself to believe that she has truly left us. I feel her presence in every lesson she taught. In every phrase she corrected. In every *raga* she taught.

In every concert she prepared us for. In every value she instilled in us.

I will miss you beyond words. But I will carry you with me for the rest of my life but will honestly admit that a part of me has died today too.

Om Shanti.



LALITH, MY JAM AND BISCUIT FRIEND

PRAKASH AROOR

I knew Lalith from pre-independence days. She was just six months older than me. I have clear memories of the annual sports held every December at the Canara Union. I first saw her in 1947 as co-competitor in the toddler's category CU sports held for participants in age-wise groups.

The events for toddlers were Jam and Biscuit, Lime and Spoon, Basketing Marbles and Threading the Needle. We were five of us—Lalith, Guru Nagarkar, Ramanand Bellare, a girl called Sulochana and I.





The first item was the Lime and Spoon race. We had to balance the lime in the spoon, run 50 feet up and return without dropping the lime. Lalith was a good sprinter and with her excellent balance came first while I dropped the lime halfway!



AI Image

The second item was Jam and Biscuit. In the game, biscuits were placed on a high bench. We had to hold our hands behind us and finish the biscuits using only our mouths. At the end of the speed race, we had to open our mouths and show the judges that we had eaten and swallowed the whole biscuit.



AI Image

Lalith and Guru raced to the bench where five biscuits with jam tops were placed. The three of us arrived shortly after them. I with my big mouth finished the biscuit and ran towards the starting point. But Lalith with jam on her cheeks overtook me and got there first!

Needless to say, she won the marbles game too. She aimed and threw all the ten marbles one after the other accurately into the basket, placed a distance away. Her aim was faultless and stayed that way years later, when she and the Mysore Basketball team won the Nationals at Jaipur.

I truly cherish these memories.

A PILLAR AND A BEACON

TARA KINI

It is so hard to imagine life without Lalithakka's physical presence. She has been such a strong, impressive, supportive and guiding presence in my life, since I was 11 years old!

I first heard about Lalithakka from my music guru, Shri Narayan Rao Patwardhan. "I listened to a young girl singing today, who was just brilliant in every way", he said. He was a judge for the All-India Radio national competition for upcoming artists. "I wanted to award her the prize, but the others on the panel felt that she was so young, she would always get another chance, so they awarded it to another contestant." He was speaking about Lalith Dhareshwar.

Soon after, on the terrace of our neighbouring friend's home, I had the first vision of a newly minted Lalith J. Rao, with her husband, Jayavanthmam, both glowing and radiant. Lalithakka's trilling laughter, her joyous persona and friendly warmth, are imprinted in my mind to this day, six decades later.

I heard her sing on several occasions in Delhi before they moved to Bombay, and I was thoroughly inspired each time. Lalithakka's phenomenal performance on the 60th birthday of our guru, Pandit Rama Rao V. Naik, was a concert that had a life-changing impact on me. I played the recording of that Raga Todi on cassettes over and over again.

It was only in 1988, when Lalithakka had moved to Madras and I to Bangalore, that I picked up the courage to ask her whether I could travel to Madras and learn from her, once a month. I quote from her letter, which is preserved in my music notebook to this day. After expressing her appreciation of the fact that I was going to start lessons with her in addition to a full-time



teaching job, managing family and home, she wrote, "I shall try my best to make your trip worthwhile and impart what I can teach you."

That is quintessential Lalithakka. Hailed as the leading vocalist of the Agra Gharana in the country by then, she still wrote with such humility!

Our decades of Guru Shishya bonding started then. She taught me Shuddha Sarang over 18 months. Though I had learnt from Rama Rao ji for several years, Lalithakka's style was unique and it was a fresh beginning. Each session left me with the brilliance of her music lighting up my soul. It also established my deep reverence for her as my real Akka, my guide, my mentor and true friend.

At one point I said, "Lalithakka, I hope I go before you do, because life will be unliveable without you!" To which she responded, "That is so selfish of you, Tara." She was right, as she always was. And today, her living presence guides me through the music she has gifted me, that will stay with me in the core of my being, beyond this life.

MY GUIDING LIGHT

NISHANT PANICKER

Aunty was more than a guru to me. Her way of living life by example has inspired me and made me strive to become a better person. I find myself recalling moments that signify the joy, meaning and true purpose Aunty brought to my life. Her kindness and affection shone through her persona.



I fondly remember the countless mornings I would go for music lessons, and the first thing Aunty would say when she saw me would be “Gonnu, have you eaten your breakfast?” I would sheepishly say no, and with no qualms whatsoever, she would quickly heat up breakfast and make sure I had eaten, prior to starting the lesson. And after she patiently sat with me for an hour long session, narrating the notations of *ragas* and words of compositions out loud for me to write down, making me repeat the phrases I never quite got right and saying, “Now sing this another 60-70 times when you practise and then it will be polished”, she would then ask me if I would like to have chai.

Her grace and humility were highly evident, and you could tell whenever you were at her side - even being a highly acclaimed artist and an iconic figure, she would still treat each and every person who came across her path with the utmost respect. Whenever there was an artist in attendance at a *baithak* or a recital, she would always acknowledge their presence and seek their blessings. Aunty had a strong sense of humour, and her light-hearted nature made us *shishyas* feel like we were all one big family - there are several running jokes that we had amongst us that still make me grin from ear to ear. Aunty’s deep devotion for her guru and her single-minded dedication to the Agra *gharana* radiated through the very fabric of her being - through every *bandish*, through each tale of the yesteryears, she would be reminded of Khan saheb. Lalith Aunty and Jayavanth Uncle spent decades archiving and detailing various facets of the Agra *gharana*, work that is of immense value and that provides deep insight into one of our country’s most rich cultural heritages.

I feel truly fortunate and blessed that I grew up having Lalith Aunty as my guiding light. Her belief in me was unwavering and it made me believe in myself. Her love toward me was a grandmother’s love. The knowledge and values she instilled in me gave me a sense of direction and purpose that I know will last me throughout my life. I don’t know how I will ever fill the void that I feel with her passing. With gratitude, I offer my humble *pranaams* at the lotus feet of my dear guru.

GRIHA LAKSHMI, ARDHAANGINI PAARVATI, GAANA SARASWATI: A EULOGY TO OUR BELOVED LALMA

SARAS RAO AND GAYATRI MADAN DUTT

She came into our family holding a *taanpura*, bearing a smile of great charm. This is her picture which remains enshrined in our minds. We had gone to receive her at the station. On the railway platform, easily identifiable, stood a too-slim young woman, precariously balancing a *taanpura* with care, not trusting it to a coolie. It was bulky in comparison to her slight frame.



She had recently returned from her University in Fredericton, Canada. She had lost a lot of weight there. Being a strict vegetarian, she had been unable in those days to find the food of her choice in a non-vegetarian milieu. The kilos dropped. Her professors even threatened to send her back to India if she didn't make some allowances to eat a more varied diet. She had relented only somewhat, and with much reluctance.

She earned her Masters in Biomedical Electronics with distinction. We were told that, for many years, her brilliant thesis became a reference source for researchers in her field. Immediately after graduation, she embarked on an exploration of the North American continent — alone, journeying on the well-

known Greyhound Buses. She later toured Europe too. We children were in admiring awe of our widely travelled Lalithanni: our Lalma, as we later came to call her.

Generous and giving like the open-handed Goddess Lakshmi, she showered us with gifts, always eager to share her jewels, clothes, hiking shoes, with us. If she gave a beautiful French quilt to Prabhakarmaam and Ramapacchi Dhareshwar, a fine couple who watered and nurtured their young sapling, she would give one to our Pappa and Amma too, lavishing equal affection on both sets of parents. She cared for us when we were ill, attentively nursing us back to health.

She had the loveliest eyes. A mother once saw eyes like hers in her own child and named her baby daughter Lalith. The beauty of Princess Helen of Troy is said to have launched a thousand ships. Our Lalma's eyes/her very personality mesmerised thousands too, even total strangers.

She was born to sing. At age three, she would recognise the labels and pick up 78 rpm records of songs she was particularly fond of, and tell her parents to play them for her. She was also born to attain success. Her aunt told us how, as a child, she possessed an iron will to achieve (as she did in every pursuit she took up: academics, sports, music). Her entire body language would speak her emotions. When she had passed her exams with flying colours, the young schoolgirl came home, skipping joyously. If she had slipped even a little from the

top ranks, you could catch sight of her approaching, shoulders, face, her very walk, dripping in droop and disappointment.

If she blessed our home with her presence, destiny blessed her with a partner extraordinaire: our brother, Jayavanthanna, her biggest fan, always at her side, a pillar of strength. He heaped adoration on her, ever encouraging, ever ready to be her right hand in all her projects. Backed by his devoted support, Lalma rendered abundant service to Hindustani Classical Music: interviewing living greats, recording their rare *raagas* and compositions. Their untiring joint effort has been lauded by the music community. As Lord Shiva and Goddess Paarvati merged together, pooling their *shaktis* to keep *dharma* strong in the world, Anna and Lalma merged together in their exertion to strengthen the roots of India's music tradition, he, her Ardhaangin, she, his Ardhaangini. As her student Manohar Patwardhan has said: Theirs was a true and rare partnership.

As taught by Sri Krishna in the Geeta, Lalma passed on the treasure of her Geeta Gyaana to eleven *shishyas* without any expectation of its fruit.

Their only child, Sanjeev, whom, as a baby, they had christened "our Prince of Wails, our Sun and Air", is based in France. He spread awareness of his mother's art in Europe, initiating her and Jayavanthanna's interview by the prestigious magazine, Paris Match's international edition, Match du Monde.

Our beloved Lalma, you have left us. As you brought auspiciousness to our home, you will make your new home at the Divine Couple's Feet additionally auspicious too, mesmerising Them too with your caring eyes, your deep dedication, your melodious music. Griha Lakshmi, Ardhaangini Paarvati, Gaana Saraswati, memories of you will stay evergreen.



REMINISCENCES, CONTEMPLATION, SALUTATIONS

SUSHEELA MEHTA

So many images flash across my mind as I remember Lalith J. Rao - Lalithakka to me.

Her serene smile, her kind visage, her unique sense of humour, her practical down-to-earth attitude, her affection to all her students, her devotion to her family, her kindness to their staff, her helpful nature to any one in need, but above all her total dedication to Music and her Gurus.

While we have all imbibed a part of the vast musical treasure, of which she was the rightful

custodian and zealous guardian, we have also learned many a philosophical truth. When she was in the painful grip of her illness which refused to let go, she bore her suffering with equanimity and gentle acceptance as the will of God.



Endowed with a generous, giving nature, Jayavanth bhayya and Lalithakka opened their hearts out to the students sharing their priceless collection of musical recordings of the great masters.

Lalithakka was a person with versatile talents. She could be found doing exquisite needle and appliqué work; at other times, one would find her preparing delectable treats in the kitchen. Her hospitality was unsurpassed - every guest would receive the same care and attention. Whether it was in Mumbai, Delhi or Bengaluru, all great musicians loved to stay at their residence; others would make it a point to visit them, and in all likelihood a *Baithak* would be organised for the visiting musician.

As a teacher, she was able to bring out the best in the student, as she unfolded the mysteries of each *raga* and brought us in close communion with the Soul of Music.

Being related to Lalithakka, since childhood, I saw that my family was a great admirer of Lalithakka's powerful music. As I grew older, I understood its inner beauty. Learning from her brought me closer to the Divinity pulsating in every note.

Her whole life was musical - I offer my salutations to Lalithakka, the Incarnation of Music.



A LIFETIME OF BRILLIANCE, KINDNESS, AND ENDEARING GRACE

SHANTI SUBBARAMAN

Took some time to express my thoughts in verse. No AI.

Dear luminous Guru, magnanimous, O warm beacon

You have not only guided our music, but made our minds awaken

Your glorious Nom Toms, Bol Baant and beautiful Tihais

Have sparked our imagination and made us rejoice

*Blessed are we, by Nature's design
To have been shishyas of this Guru divine*

A lifetime of brilliance, kindness, and endearing grace

Your voice may have rested, but your music forever stays

I was lucky to experience Lalith Auntie's brilliance and warmth by virtue of taking my son Nishant to learn from her. How creatively she engaged a naughty 10-year-old and gently coaxed him to imbibe the intricacies of the Agra *gharana gayaki*! Auntie was magnanimous to include me in her group classes and group productions. Those were some of the best times in my life, really grateful for that. A lifetime will not suffice to absorb the wealth of knowledge Auntie has given us with her superb teaching, her meticulous documentation of *ragas* and *bandishes* and the wealth of live music recordings she has shared with us. Blessed to have been in the presence of this divine soul.



ECHOES OF THE VATAVRIKSHA - A TRIBUTE TO VIDUSHI LALITH J. RAO

PANDIT VYASMURTI KATTI

The world knows her as Vidushi Lalith J. Rao—the doyenne of the Agra-Atrauli *gharana*, the Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee, the intellectual powerhouse with a degree in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, and the global ambassador who brought India's classical heritage to the grandest stages of the world. But when a bond spans a quarter of a century, crossing continents and weaving through the deep intimacy of shared notes, the public titles fade away. To me, she was, and will always remain, Lalith Auntie. She was a giant of music who chose to wrap her immense authority in the tender warmth of a mother's love. She was our VataVriksha—the magnificent banyan tree that gave so many of us our musical shelter (आसरा), refuge (निवारा), and gentle shade (सावली).

Losing her feels like a deep, personal tear in the fabric of existence. Over the past few days, the last twenty-five years have been moving through my mind like a film—a kaleidoscope of brilliant concert halls, quiet studio corridors, long car rides, and the absolute purity of her laughter. Words feel fundamentally insufficient to capture a persona so vast, yet the heart demands that we articulate the sheer richness she brought into our lives.

Conquering the Masculine Citadel of Agra Gayaki

To truly understand Lalit Auntie's contribution to Indian classical music is to understand the formidable nature of the Agra *gharana*. Historically, this lineage was a fortress of

masculine energy. It was defined by its physical power, the booming depth of the open-throat *aakaar*, the vigorous and deeply rhythmic architecture of the *Nom-Tom Alap*, and a fierce, sometimes aggressive interplay with rhythm (*layakari*). For generations, it was widely believed that a female voice could not command this style without losing its inherent grace, or that the style itself was too heavy for a woman to sustain.

Lalith Auntie did not just enter this male-dominated arena; she conquered it. She did so not by imitating masculine force, but by translating the *gharana's* structural grandeur into a pristine, highly intellectual, and deeply emotional language. She proved that power did not require brute vocal muscle—it required structural clarity, mathematical precision, and an unyielding aesthetic vision. Through her legendary gurus, Pandit Ramrao Naik and Ustad Khadim Hussain Khan Saheb, she absorbed the purest essence of the tradition and re-engineered how the world looks at Raag Sangeet. She gave the art form a new lens, showing that the intellectual rigor of a *raga* could coexist beautifully with profound emotional depth.



The Hidden Architecture Behind the Magic

As a harmonium player, my journey with her began professionally, but it quickly dissolved

into something resembling a close-knit family. I was in my early thirties when I first stepped into her world; she and Jayavanth Uncle were in their late fifties. To sit beside a maestro of her calibre on stage is an experience that alters a musician's DNA. From that close proximity, I didn't just experience the vibes of her music; I witnessed the meticulous science behind her genius.

Audiences only see the effortless magic that unfolds under the stage lights, but by her side, I learned the invisible discipline required to create that magic. I remember our trip to Paris for a performance at the historic Cité de la Musique. We were scheduled to perform around midnight—a time that completely disrupts the body's natural rhythm.

Auntie's planning for that concert was a masterclass in professional choreography. Every single detail was mapped out with scientific precision: exactly what to eat, what to avoid, the precise hour to rest, and when to warm up the voice so it wouldn't suffer midnight fatigue. More than that, she knew how to prepare her accompanying team mentally. She understood that a vocalist can only soar if her accompanists feel secure.

That night, before a packed auditorium of 2,500 people, her music held the crowd in a state of absolute, pin-drop silence. When the final note resonated and faded into the hall, the venue erupted. The audience stood and clapped tirelessly for more than five minutes, frantically expressing their joy and gratitude. To be on that stage, providing the harmonic canvas on the harmonium while that wave of global appreciation washed over us, was an unforgettable milestone.

A Mother's Care on Foreign Shores

While she commanded global reverence, her heart remained fiercely protective of her

musical family. During a tour in Switzerland, while traveling by train, the passive cigarette smoke in the air conditioning system triggered a severe allergic reaction in my system. By the time we reached our destination, I was running a high temperature.

The next day was reserved for rare sightseeing—a chance to explore the beautiful Swiss landscapes. Knowing how demanding her schedule was, I insisted that the group go ahead while I stayed back to recover before the upcoming concert.

In high-pressure international tours, main artists understandably conserve their own energy and focus entirely on their performance. Lalith Auntie's maternal instinct completely took over. She refused to go sightseeing. She stayed back with me in the house we were put up, playing the role of a caregiver. Time and again, she checked on my fever, administered medication, and made sure I was comfortable.

I am not her formal shishya in the institutional sense, but the labels of the music world evaporated at times. She was like a Guru to me. The sheer comfort of her presence and her motherly care was the best medicine; I recovered just in time to play the concert the next day. That experience taught me that her greatness was not restricted to the stage; it was rooted in her capacity for selfless love.

The Heavenly Car Rides

Our collaboration extended into massive archival projects, none more significant than the monumental recording of the compositions (*bandishes*) of her Guru, Ustad Khadim Hussain Khan Saheb (who composed under the pen name Sajan Piyá). This project was a massive undertaking involving her disciples, countless hours of rehearsals, intense studio tracking, editing, and final mastering.

Because each student was assigned individual compositions, they only needed to memorize their specific pieces. But as the accompanying harmonium player, I had to internalize, map, and adapt to every single composition in the entire project, adjusting instantly to different tempos, vocal ranges, and individual phrasings.

During those intense months, we met constantly. She would call me to her house, and we would travel together in her vehicle to the studio. Those car journeys through the streets of Bangalore were what I can only describe as *Swarg* (heaven). Sitting beside her, talking casually about music, absorbing her philosophies, and hearing anecdotes of the legendary maestros was an education that no classroom could ever provide. We heard the great Siddheshwari Devi's *thumri* on one such drive. Auntie was in tears. So very sensitive to beautiful music.

What touched me deeply during these drives and studio sessions was her supreme humility. Despite her staggering seniority, she would consistently ask for my consent and input before finalizing any recording take. She viewed her accompanist not as a subordinate, but as an equal artistic partner whose ears and judgment she implicitly trusted.

When the project finally got published, Auntie called all of us home. We celebrated with a lunch party. As the students discussed the historical importance of Khan Saheb's compositions, Auntie suddenly remembered something. She turned to her students, pointed at me, and said proudly, "Look, all of you have individually sung a few compositions, but you know he had to learn all the compositions and accompany all of you. So in that sense, he knows all the compositions." To have a

legendary figure publicly acknowledge my labour and validate my role in front of her inner circle was a profoundly humbling experience that I will treasure forever.

The Mischievous Smile and Lasting Blessings

In the years following the pandemic, life became scattered for the musical community. The physical gatherings dwindled, and we could not meet as often as we used to. I felt a lingering sadness that I couldn't visit her home as frequently during those later years. However, on a day when she was being honoured with a prestigious award, I made sure to be there in the audience.

After the function, I walked up to her to congratulate her and seek her blessings. She looked at me, and that characteristic, brilliant wit flashed in her eyes. With a mischievous smile, she said, "Who is this? I don't recognize you!" Before I could even process the joke, she affectionately took my hand in hers, squeezed it, and said, "Vyasmurti, you have forgotten your auntie!"

How could I ever forget her? In that single, playful sentence, she swept away the years of forced distance caused by the pandemic. By teasingly accusing me of forgetting her, she let me know that I was still deeply missed, deeply valued, and firmly held in her thoughts.

Her affection was never limited to the boundaries of music. She was a constant, loving presence in my personal life. When my daughters were born, she came to our home, holding them and pouring her heartfelt blessings over our entire family. She would regularly enquire about my wife and our children, genuinely rejoicing whenever she heard about their academic progress. I would

always take her blessings by visiting her in person whenever I had to travel abroad.

An Eternal Legacy

When she turned eighty, I unfortunately could not attend the formal celebrations. I went to her house a few days later to convey my respects and brought her a beautiful saree as a gift. She looked at it with immense fondness and said with touching, vulnerable honesty, "Why all this, Vyasmurti? You have brought such a beautiful saree, but I don't go out these days... so I don't know when I will wear this. But I really liked the saree."

As her health began to deteriorate further, I kept track of her well-being. I had spoken to Jayavanth Uncle, mentioning that I would call and schedule a visit to see her very soon. But it was not to be. The news of her passing arrived suddenly, leaving me utterly devastated.

The physical form of our beloved Vataavriksha is no longer with us, and the silence she leaves behind is profound. Yet, as I look back on this quarter-century, I realize that my greatest life assets are the ones she gifted me: the priceless experience of sharing her stage, the echoes of her words of wisdom, the memory of her music, and the immense love she showered upon me and my family.

She was गुरुतुल्य (like a Guru) and मातृतुल्य (like a mother). The shade of her banyan tree will continue to protect and guide my musical journey for as long as I play and sing. I pray to the Almighty to grant her noble, departed soul eternal peace and salvation.

Om Shanti.

A LEGACY OF BOUNDLESS LOVE

MALLIKA KILPADY

Lalith Aunty departs....

It seemed as though Maa Saraswati herself descended on Earth, weaving soulful melodies that lifted hearts and offered glimpses of the divine.

In her earthly form, she became a nurturing Mother Parvati to so many students, guiding, teaching, and showering us with boundless love.

Lalithpacchi's care was undeniable when she visited me during my slipped disc and attended my 'Goad bhara'. She waited for Kanika's

arrival with eager enthusiasm. Her genuine affection was evident every time a baby was born in the Guru Bandhus' family or any of us achieved a career milestone as if it was her own triumph. She pushed us all to take up concerts and be more enterprising. At the same time, focus on our chosen career was non-negotiable. It is rare to find a guru so deeply invested in her students.



After a long and selfless innings of enriching countless lives, she has now returned to the celestial realms, reunited with the gods, leaving behind a legacy of music, grace, and cherished

memories that will forever resonate in our hearts.

Om Shanti

WITH ME FOR EVER

PRATIMA GANESH

मातृ देवो भव पितृ देवो भव
आचार्य देवो भव अतिथि देवो भव

Mother, Father, The Guru and Guest are considered God in our culture. How would a person's bliss be when the Guru is also a motherly figure. That blessed person is me - being blessed with a Guru like Lalith Aunty who also nurtured me with motherly care.

After Aunty and Uncle moved to Bangalore, I had the good fortune of starting my music talim with Aunty. That was also just after my Guru Pt. Rama Rao V Naik had passed away. I was blank and felt directionless when Aunty took me under her musical care. Academically, I was a student of engineering at that time.

I had heard Aunty's live performance at Rama Rao Guruji's Shraddhanjali programme and was awe-struck by her *vidya*, ease and expertise in her rendition. I wondered how such a great artiste who was an ocean of knowledge could be so humble and grounded as well.

Aunty took me through the beautiful world of *raags* and its intricacies but giving me the choice of *raag* I wanted to learn. I was in awe of the complex, yet beautiful *bandishes* Aunty taught me and the variety of *laykari* and *laybol* that she used to teach me. Initially, I found it

challenging to learn them and enjoyed listening to it more!

I used to drive to Malleshwaram on my two-wheeler and Aunty generally came to the balcony to see me off after class. On one such occasion she asked me, "Where is your helmet ma?" I didn't use one, and I told her that. She said, "If you want to come for the next class," (which was two days away) "you have to wear a helmet." Not just saying that, she called my mother on the home line (no mobile phones in those days) and said that same thing to my mother too. Next day, my father and I were busy helmet shopping! Why would anybody care for



these small things? Aunty cared, like a mother would, about my safety.

In 2003, Aunty had a concert tour in Europe, and she blessed me with the opportunity of accompanying them as a student vocalist. My joy knew no bounds, and I looked forward to the practice sessions with Aunty, learning and practicing the *raags* and *bandishes* she was performing. Being my debut overseas trip, there were many things new to me and Aunty guided me with patience and care, teaching me nuances and finesse - both in music and in life. From making sure I locked my hotel room door properly, to teaching me how to eat a kiwi fruit, to encouraging me to cook cauliflower *sabzi* in Switzerland, when I didn't know how to cook at all!

Another beautiful experience I recall is that which happened in Switzerland. We were staying in the organiser's house and the room heater in my room wasn't working. The window wasn't shutting fully, and it was cold. Aunty came to check on me and noticed that I was wearing two jackets. She just went over to the window and the room heater to feel it and then called me aside. She pulled my floor mattress out of the room, all the way into their room, on her side of the bed and said, "Come and sleep ma". I didn't expect that at all. It was like a child sharing space with her parents. That gesture of hers really touched me so much, supremely blessed I felt, affection to such an extent!

In the mid-2000s, she told some of us who were overseas that she would teach us on Skype, as our learning was not continuous. So generous

and thoughtful was our dear Aunty. Learnt so much from her on our Skype lessons and our wonderful group sessions during Covid, when she encouraged all of us to explain the *raags* and sing them and to learn compositions from each other also, along with teaching us many *aprachalit raags* also.

When I visited Aunty in mid-2025, I was very emotionally moved when I saw her lying down and yet singing such brilliant phrases, teaching us more of ideas and improvisation. Health issues did not prevent Aunty from thinking about music and teaching us. She wanted to give us more and more. Her mind was producing musical ideas akin to an ocean producing waves - continuous, creative and each wave different from the other.

The last time I saw Aunty was in December 2025. She told me thrice that day, "Come back to Bangalore ma", I fought back my tears very hard that day.

Aunty is with me, and she will be with me forever - through her music, her singing, through the music she has blessed me with. My life is complete - being under the छत्रछाया of wonderful Guruvaryas - Lalith Aunty and Jayavanth Uncle.

शतकोटि नमन, साष्टांग प्रणाम
गुरु ब्रह्मा गुरुतः विष्णुः गुरु देवो माहेश्वरह
गुरुः साक्षात् पर ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरुवे नमः

“Music is the worship of the Divine, and it requires a life of dedication to truly understand its depth.”

— Ustad Ali Akbar Khan

A PIECE OF OUR HEART GONE FOREVER!

DEEPA HATTANGADY KARNAD

"Deepa, kashi assa ma - tukka polonka mhonu dista cherda" rings in my ears ...

The passing of our dearest Lalith Pachi has left an irreplaceable void in our lives. A giver like none other, of music, love, care, affection, nourishment – of the soul and body, a true mother, who had nothing but our best interests at heart. A woman with exceptional grit, determination and conviction, graced this world that only rewarded popularity over substance. Her Sadhana was immense and Guru Bhakti – unparalleled!

She stays on through our countless memories with her, of our *Riyaz* with her, our conversations, her humour, her ringing high pitched laughter, a presence that was so comforting and loving! A once in a lifetime phenomenon for her students – and the lives she touched! Lalith – as evident was never just a morning *Raag*!



HER MUSIC, VALUES, LOVE, AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

LAKSHMI RAO

Lalith Akka and my husband Arvind were first cousins, and he had grown up in their house during the latter part of his school years and so were very close. She was more like a sister to me, and I feel privileged to have been so closely associated with both Jayavanth Anna and Lalith Akka.

I have also been her student -- not of music, but of life lessons --- not by what she told me but by the values she lived by and who she was --- a very warm, genuine and affectionate person, a loving sister to me and aunt to my children, a warm hostess (we always stayed with them when we came to Bangalore), a beloved teacher, a wonderful grandmother, an award-winning athlete, a brilliant academic, a great singer, a generous donor not only to the Math but to many others---such a multi-faceted

personality but always grounded in family and her duties and an inspiring role model to many. So much to learn from her!

I have been thinking – how can one person excel in so many things and what is the lesson to be learnt here. The greatest lesson I have learnt from her I think is getting your priorities right and then giving 100 percent of yourself to whatever you are doing at any point of time—whether it was cooking, grandparenting, planning her programmes, lec-dems, or hosting guests – she gave of herself totally without holding back. She was totally in the present in all her actions but perhaps that is the secret to excellence in any field. I am in the process of understanding this concept from her but pity I am learning it so late.

I also learnt from Lalith Akka what *bhakti* towards your Gurus and your craft means. Her *shraddha* towards her Gurus and her music was so palpable it always moved me. I have read H.H. Bade Swamiji's examples of a carpenter's reverence towards trees, potters towards the mud and have seen it in Lalith Akka's reverence and approach towards her music and her gurus. She also gave of herself unstintingly to her students and they also reciprocated in equal measure -- the old-world Guru Shishya Parampara was truly beautiful to see. I often told her students I envy them for all that they have received from her - the music, the values, the love and much more.

I would also like to quote my brother who had met her occasionally and who, after a magical musical night in Delhi, had messaged her -- lines from one of the songs sung that day: "*Jo bhi aaye is mehfil mein, huye woh khush apne apne dil mein*". He says, "Every time I heard her sing and met her, I came away touched by her

music, her personality and enveloped in a deep, warm happiness." That was Lalith Akka. He goes on to add, "If after 10 years her music still resonates in me, I am sure that in her students the music and her values will resonate forever." And so, her legacy will continue.



Thank you Lalith Akka for all that you were not only to me but for being a wonderful role model to my children in their growing up years in Delhi. I am ever grateful for that and for all your life lessons. Will always miss you and your affectionate ways but also know that your love and blessings will always be with me and the children. Thank you Lalith Akka.



EMBODIMENT OF MUSICAL MASTERY

KAILASH KULKARNI

Gourang Maam introduced me to Pachi in 2011. I had just returned from the US and was looking for someone who had learnt from Ustad Khadim Hussain Khan in Bangalore. Nana (Pt. Narayanrao Bodas) who was my former Guru would mesmerize me with the *bol banav*, *layabol*, etc. and attribute these to Khan Saheb.

I was thrilled when Pachi agreed to teach me as I would finally learn the Agra *gayaki* that I was so looking forward to learning. One thing that immediately struck me was Pachi's rendering was so dignified with the *banav* developed to

perfection. While Pachi would attribute it to Khan Saheb, I would tell her time and again that she had taken his *gayaki* to a very different *darjaa* that was not visible in Khan Saheb's other students. The design, the dynamics, the contrasts, and of course the seamless landing on sam with killer, effortless *tihais* ... *Kya Kehne*. With Pachi I truly learnt ... *Khyal Ho To Aisa*.



Over the last 16 years, I have known Pachi as only "Giving". Not just freely distributing her musical knowledge and resources but also the magnanimity to appreciate all artists no matter their age and experience. She would also encourage us to learn from each other and also imbibe forms of *gayaki* that would make one a complete singer. She would lead by example

with love and a genuine concern for our well-being. She would regularly remind us on how we were not doing enough to promote ourselves. Needless to say, we are indebted to Pachi to take this *gayaki*, *gharana* and its proliferation forward.

Dear Pachi, you will truly live in all our hearts. Love you forever.

A TRIBUTE TO MY BELOVED GURUMA

LALITHA RAMESH

With profound respect, gratitude, and a heart full of memories, I offer my humble tribute to my beloved Guruma.

Born into a musical family, with my father, Pt. D.S. Garud (Tabla Maestro), as my first inspiration, music was always an inseparable part of my life. Yet it was under your loving guidance that my true musical journey began. Looking back, sixteen years have passed in what feels like a fleeting moment. Such was the depth of your knowledge and wisdom that even seven lifetimes would not be enough for me to learn even a fraction of what you carried within you.

Through every stage of my learning, you nurtured me with patience, wisdom, and unwavering encouragement. Whenever self-doubt clouded my path, your words gave me confidence. Whenever I struggled, your guidance illuminated the way forward. You never allowed me to give up on music, and because of your faith in me, I continued to grow—not only as a student of music but also as a human being.

You were far more than a teacher, you were my role model, my inspiration, and a guiding light.

I had the privilege of learning numerous ragas under your tutelage, each one carrying lessons that I will cherish forever. Your mastery of music was extraordinary, but what touched me even more was your humility. Despite your immense

accomplishments and vast knowledge, you remained simple, approachable, compassionate, and deeply grounded. Your down-to-earth nature made every student feel seen, valued, and encouraged.

As I progressed in my musical journey, your blessings became the foundation of my confidence. Your dedication to your students, your generosity in sharing knowledge, and your unconditional love for music will continue to inspire generations to come.

Thank you, Guruma, for believing in me, encouraging me, and shaping my journey. I will remain forever grateful for the blessing of being your student.



GRATEFUL MEMORIES

VANDANA PANDIT

My relationship with Lalith Pachi started many years before I even met her properly. She was my aunt and then became my guru years later. Her parents - Rama Pachi and Prabhakar Maam - lived in Malleswaram. Since my father was in the Air Force and stationed in Jalahalli - quite a distance away, we would go over to their place often if hungry after school or simply to shelter ourselves from the rain. Rama Maami (much like Lalith Pachi) would feed us, and once poor Prabhakar Maam painstakingly ironed our uniforms after my sister and I got drenched running to their home from our school - Cluny Convent - just a couple of roads away. Later, Sanjeev and I became good friends also and kept in touch.



I started learning music from Lalith Pachi in 2005, after they settled in Bangalore from Delhi. I had learnt music as a child for many years but had taken a long break. I

really enjoyed my classes and the mellifluous richness and history of the Agra Gharana. Besides being such a huge entity in the world of Hindustani classical music, Pachi had a great sense of humour, was down to earth and was always ready for a hearty laugh. Our group sessions were also fun with a lot of camaraderie and bonhomie. My Guru Bandhus (GBs) are also a fun lot, always ready for a joke besides being immensely talented!

In 2016, I decided to stop singing but never lost touch with my Guru Bandhus and Pachi.

Just before Lalith Pachi and Jayavanth Maam settled in Bangalore, I had gone to Delhi for a wedding. I went to visit them at their lovely Delhi home. She was delighted to see me, gave me some fabulous filter coffee, fed me and gave me socks to wear in that harsh Delhi winter. She then took me shopping! We had a wonderful time. She had so many varied facets to her and not just in music. I will really miss her.

Did You Know...

The Time Theory of Ragas: Hindustani ragas are strictly bound to specific times of the day or seasons. A morning *raga* like *Raag Bhairav* is mathematically and emotionally designed to match the tranquil energy of dawn, while *Raag Yaman* evokes the mood of evening twilight.

The 22 Microtones: While Western music splits an octave into 12 semitones, Hindustani music splits it into 22 distinct microtones called *shrutis*. These subtle, fractional intervals allow singers to effortlessly glide between notes rather than stepping on them directly.



Lalithpachi and Jayavanthmam with her students

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SUMAN KALYANPUR: A MELODIOUS VOICE THAT WILL LIVE FOREVER

ANAND NAGARKAR



The passing of Padma Bhushan Suman Kalyanpurji marks the end of a glorious chapter in Indian film music. Gifted with a voice of extraordinary sweetness, grace, and emotional depth, she was one of the most admired playback singers of the golden era of Indian cinema. Over a career spanning several decades, she sang thousands of songs in Hindi, Marathi, and many other Indian languages, leaving behind a rich musical legacy that continues to delight music lovers across generations.

Born as Suman Hemmadi on January 28, 1937, to Shankar Rao and Seeta Hemmadi, in Dhaka (Now in Bangladesh), she spent her early years in Mumbai, where she received formal training in classical music. Although she initially pursued studies in fine arts and had a keen interest in

painting, music eventually became her life's calling.



Suman Kalyanpur rose to prominence during the 1950s and 1960s, a period often regarded as the golden age of Hindi film music. Her voice possessed a unique combination of purity and elegance that made her songs instantly appealing. Her entry into film industry came after ghazal singer Talat Mahmood heard her at a public event and reportedly asked her to sing for his film. Her first song was “Koi Pukare Dheere Se Tujhe”.

Some of her most memorable songs include “Na Na Karte Pyar Tumhi Se,” “Aaj Kal Tere Mere Pyar Ke Charche,” “Na Tum Hame Jano,” and the beautiful Marathi lullaby “Nimbonichya Zhadaamage.” These songs remain evergreen classics even today.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Suman Kalyanpur's career was the remarkable similarity between her voice and that of Lata Mangeshkar. Many listeners, and sometimes even music professionals, found it difficult to distinguish between the two voices. Yet Sumanji always maintained that she never consciously imitated anyone and remained humble and gracious when comparisons were made.

A particularly interesting chapter in her career was her association with Mohammed Rafi. During a period when Rafi and Lata Mangeshkar were not recording together because of a disagreement over royalty payments, many music directors turned to Sumanji for duets with Rafi. The result was a series of unforgettable songs that became immensely popular and showcased her exceptional talent. Their musical partnership remains one of the most cherished in Indian film music (Over 150 duets!)



Another lesser-known fact is that Suman Kalyanpur and Lata Mangeshkar actually sang together in a duet. Music lovers often recall how difficult it was to identify which singer was rendering which line because of the striking resemblance in their voices.

Despite her success, Sumanji led a life marked by simplicity and dignity. She stayed away from publicity and controversies and preferred to let her music speak for itself. Her humility, professionalism, and dedication earned her the respect of fellow musicians and audiences alike.

Few people know that before establishing herself as a playback singer, she was a student of the prestigious Sir J. J. School of Art. Had music not become her destiny, India might have known her as a distinguished artist rather than a celebrated singer.

Sumanji's contribution to Indian music is immense. While she may not always have received recognition accorded to some of her contemporaries, her songs continue to occupy a special place in the hearts of music lovers. Her voice carried an effortless charm that could express romance, devotion, longing, joy, and tenderness with equal ease.

In recognition of her immense contribution to Indian music, she was honored and blessed by our Parama Poojya Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji in 2023.



The last rites of Sumanji were performed with full state honours, attended by several Union Ministers, leaders, members of cultural fraternity, and amchis.

Today, as we remember Suman Kalyanpur, we celebrate not only a remarkable singer but also an artist of rare grace and humility. Her melodies will continue to resonate through the years, reminding us of a golden era when music touched the soul.

Some voices never fade away. They become a part of our memories, our emotions, and our lives. Suman Kalyanpurji's voice is one such timeless treasure.

Did You Know...

The Gender Assignment of Melodies: In the 11th-century treatise *Sangeeta Makarand*, ragas were explicitly categorized by gender. "Masculine" melodies were called *Ragas*, while "feminine" melodies were termed *Raginis*—each grouped according to the specific emotional energies they projected.

A Space Voyage Track: A recording of *Raag Bhairavi* sung by the legendary *Kesarbai Kerkar* was selected by Carl Sagan to be included on the NASA Voyager Golden Record in 1977. It is currently traveling through interstellar space as a representative artifact of human creativity.

PERSONALIA

Dear Members of the Canara Union,

The Canara Union frequently gets enquiries about personal announcements. These are personal in nature, usually small, and are generally about the following:

- births, weddings, engagements, thread ceremonies
- items for sale
- services available (catering, paying guest accommodation etc)
- student performance
- success at work, awards, personalia information etc
- change of address, relocation
- seeking information about services available

'THE INDEPENDENT PAGE', for small-format, half- and full-page announcements will be published at a nominal rate. The tariff will be as follows + GST of 18%:

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OBITUARY

We convey our deepest sympathies to the family and relatives of:

Shri Uday Shankar K Rao, aged 64 years, on 22 May 2026 at Bengaluru

Smt Lalith J Rao, aged 83 years, on 10 June 2026 at Bangalore

Shri Ratnakar Gulvady, aged 92 years, on 15 June 2026 at Mangalore

Shri Molahalli Dinesh Rao, aged 90 years, on 15 June 2026 at Hyderabad

Smt Vasantlata Mirjankar, aged 102 years, on 24 June 2026 at Maryland, USA



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Notice to Donors of Canara Union's FCRA Account

With the changes in the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act (FCRA), it has become mandatory to channelize all foreign donations by a social/charitable organization in India through the State Bank of India, New Delhi, Main Branch (SBI-NDMB). In accordance with this new FCRA Regulation, Canara Union has opened a new FCRA Account with SBI (NDMB), New Delhi. Hence, the old FCRA account with Bank of India, Margosa Road, Malleswaram, Bengaluru cannot be used for any foreign inward remittance.

We give below the details of the new designated account where the Foreign donations should be remitted.

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(Canara Union Hon. Gen. Secretary: canaraunion@gmail.com)

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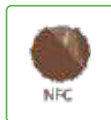
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