

Dr. Lakshmi Sreeram (Ramakrishnan)

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- **Indian Classical Vocalist - both Carnatic and Hindustani**
- **Academic – Ph.D. in Philosophy**
- **Writer – Freelancer, columnist in leading publications.**
- **Former Guest Faculty at IIT Madras**
- **Fulbright Scholar (2019-2020)**

A performer of the two major traditions of Indian Art music – the North Indian Hindustani and the South Indian Carnatic Music. Both are based on principles of melody making governed by raga but with quite different musical textures and presentation.

Lakshmi has trained for many years in the above mentioned two traditions of serious music by highly regarded masters in Mumbai and Chennai.

- **Carnatic Music:** She started training in Carnatic music at the age of seven in Chennai with Sri Ramachandrayya (1972-1978). On moving to Mumbai, she trained for many years in Mumbai under Smt. Alamelu Mani of the highly nuanced Brinda school of Carnatic Music, (1984-87) and Sri A.S. Pancapakesan (1988-94). On relocating to Chennai in 1995, she learnt for a while under Smt. T. Brinda herself and a few other musicians. Later she had the opportunity to imbibe the exquisite Musiri Bani (style) under the tutelage of Sangeeta Kalanidhi Sri T.K. Govinda Rao (2006-2009). And finally, in a culmination of my long training, she has derived immense musical and presentational insights from the ace violinist and musician Nadayogi Sri V.V. Subramanyam (2012-2016)
- **Hindustani Music:** Lakshmi started learning from Smt. Madhubala Chawla, a noted exponent of lighter genres of North Indian music who also trained her in the serious Khayal style of music. (1978 – 88). She passed, with a First Class, the Visharad Exam (equivalent to a BA degree) of the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya – a six year course with annual exams in theory and practicals. Subsequently (1989 – 96) she came under the tutelage of Pt. Vasantrao Kulkarni, a widely respected guru of the Agra and Gwalior schools of Khayal. He also taught her as a scholar of the reputed Dadar Matunga Cultural Centre. After his passing, she learnt from Pt. Babanrao Haldankar, also of the Agra school of Khayal music to extend her repertoire.

Concerts: She has performed widely in India in both styles. Some organisations that have invited her and a sample of press reviews:

- **Carnatic Music:** The Music Academy, Narada Gana Sabha, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Chennai), Sri Shanmukhananda Sabha (Mumbai), Saptak Archives (Ahmedabad) and others

Press Extracts:

- “*Lakshmi presented the raga-s Surutti and Lathangi making a perfect bouquet of vibrant shades from both.... Her exposition of Lathangi navigated through free wheeling phrases setting afloat the fine texture of the melody.*” (G. Swaminathan – *The Hindu*).
- “*It may sound presumptuous, when speaking of a senior artiste with over 20 years of experience in singing on the stage, but Lakshmi Sreeram has risen tangibly in the ladder of musical consciousness in the past two years since this listener heard her. Savouring a work of art is a holistic process. The choice of ragas, talas and composers, the way these are strung together for presentation, the faithful rendering of the compositions, at one end, and at the other, the degree of improvisations over the original, the proportion of time allotted to each piece - all these count. Add to these that ineffable something which makes for the final appeal to the soul, which one could define loosely as commitment, dedication and, in our system, devotion.*” (P.S.Krishnamurthy, *The Hindu*)

- **Hindustani Music:** National Centre For the Performing Arts, Mumbai, Dadar Matunga Cultural Centre, Mumbai, ITC Sangeeth Research Academy, (Kolkata), India International Centre (New Delhi), Saptak Archives, Ahmedabad, The Music Academy (Chennai) and others.

Press extracts:

- “*Lakshmi made a fine presentation of the ragas Miyan ki Sarang and Bhairav Bhatiyar. She has found sound moorings in classical music. Her style of singing (gayaki) is the result of considerable thinking...Her swaras are leisurely and soft while her taan-s are forceful.*” (Alka Joglekar, Maharashtra Times)
- “*Lakshmi's Khayal renditions...provided ample evidence of her fruitful studentship...she sang them all in a sonorous, well trained voice and with much aplomb and unctuous... showed a good awareness of design and proportion with the right emphasis on the vadi and samvadi awaras and precision of taala and laya.* (Mohan Nadkarni, *The Times of India*)

A recent concert review (29.03.2018) is at:

<http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/even-his-speech-sounds-musical/article23381790.ece>

- **Lectures/Lecture Demonstrations:** Lakshmi has given lectures and lecture demonstration on the two musical traditions as well as about the larger world of Indian performing arts.

- She was invited to the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhi Nagar to deliver lectures as part of their course on Indian knowledge Systems in April 2016. Her two lectures were about the performing traditions of India-classical music, dance and theater. The links to the video recordings can be found at.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4551&v=lQYNU4fVmHM
- In July 2017 she was invited by the prestigious National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai to give a lecture Demonstration about the two

musical traditions of Hindustani and Carnatic music. A review is at <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/opinion/columnists/sumana-ramanan/talking-about-music/articleshow/59749013.cms>

- In February 2018, she was one of the two opening speakers at the Graduate Conference of the Humanities Dept. of Indian Institute of Technology, Madras on the theme of Subjugated Knowledges. She made a presentation titled "**Singing on the Razor's Edge**" in which she spoke about and demonstrated Raga music as a body of knowledge that yet must be transcended during inspired music making.

Lakshmi holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Bombay, Mumbai. Her Ph.D. thesis was in the area of literary theory in the Sanskrit tradition of Alankara Sastra.

Lakshmi's research focussed on the 9th century text Dhvanyaloka, written by the Kashmiri thinker, Anandavardhana. In this he proposes a seminal idea that more than the externals of literature such as poetic devices, beauty lies in suggested meanings. He proposes a novel power of language that yields meanings beyond the literal and the metaphorical-dhvani or vyanajana. Her thesis considers his proposal in the context of theories of language articulated in the philosophical systems that he refers to.

Seminar/Conference Presentations:

- "Ragabodha – A Sabhdabodha based framework for a Theory of Raga" at the Churning of Indology conference at Udupi, January 2019 organised by Bharatiya Vidwat Parishat.
- Meera and Andal – at the National conference on "Meera – her Bhakti and Philosophy" organized by ICPR in Chattisgarh. September 2018.
- Anandaghana – Dense bliss Anandaghana: Dense Bliss in Aesthetic and Mystical experience according to Abhinavagupta. At the Conference on Peace and Reconciliation organized by Sri Vishnumohan Foundation in March 2017
- Keynote address on Music and Moksha at the conference on Liberation through the Arts in January 2015 organised by Sri Vishnumohan Foundation, Chennai.
- Artistic Intention: Its Relevance to Interpretation of Art," Annual Conference of the Indian Philosophical Society, June, 1990, Bombay.
- "The Concept of Aucitya," Bombay Philosophical Society, September, 1991.
- "J.N. Mohanty on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking," Bombay Philosophical Society, January, 1994.
- "svashabda-avaachyatva" Seminar on "Indian and Western Aesthetic Theories" organised by the Asiatic Society, Bombay, March, 1994.
- "Alankaara Shastra and Theory of Saabdabodha"," Annual Conference of the Indian Philosophical Congress, Srinagar (Garhwal), October, 1994.
- "Quine on Radical Translation," Philosophy Study Group, Bombay, January, 1995.
- "Shabdabodha: Linguistic Understanding or Linguistic Knowing?" Annual Conference of the Indian Philosophical Association, Nagpur, March, 1995.

- “Epistemological Status of Rasa,” National Seminar on “Indian Poetics,” Asiatic Society of Bombay, March, 1995.

Scholarly Publications

- “On Talk of Modes of Thought”, *The Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (JICPR)*, Volume XIII No 2, January-April 1996; refereed journal.
- “The Concept of Aucitya” in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Volumes 60-61 for 1985-86, 1991.
- “Vyangyaarthaa as a Variety of Non-Literal Meaning” in the *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Institute of Asian Studies, Madras-41, Sept. 1994
- “Conceptual Analysis and Purushartha” in *Purusā rtha*, being the proceedings of a seminar on Purusā rtha published by the Dutta Lakshmi Trust, 1995

Awards and Recognitions

- **Fulbright Scholar** (2019-2020)
- Prestigious **scholarships** for advanced training in Khayal music from Dadar Matunga Cultural Centre, Mumbai (1990-95), Sajan Milap, Mumbai (1994-96) Gaanavardhan, Pune (1993). These were given to her after open competitions.
- First class in the Sangeet Visharad of Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya
- The Music Academy, Madras, gave her a special prize for her performance at their annual concert and conference series in 1998. They specially instituted the prize to award it to her.
- **Gold Medalist**, University of Bombay, at MA for scoring highest marks.
- Appointed Fellow of the S.I.E.S. College, Sion, Bombay during M.A. by the management of the Society.
- University Grants Commission Junior Research Fellowship (1989-94)
- Appointed Research Fellow of the Prajna Pathashala Mandal, Wai. (1995-97)

Lakshmi is also trained in Bharatanatyam, a South Indian dance form. She started learning Bharatanatyam in Chennai at the reputed Music Academy school run by Smt. T. Balasaraswati. On moving to Mumbai she continued under Smt. Jayashree Nair of the Nalanda Dance Research Centre. She passed the diploma course of the centre.

- She has given dance performances during the period (1981-88). Later she stopped actively performing dance but has collaborated with dancers and theatre artists, giving them live musical accompaniment. She also writes about dance.

Teaching: Lakshmi has taught courses “Introduction to Carnatic Music” and “Introduction to Hindustani Music” at the reputed Indian Institute of Technology, Madras - IITM. She was Guest Faculty of the Humanities Dept, IITM, during the years 2011-2015.

- These are accredited courses offered as electives. Students pursuing their B.Tech could opt for these courses as a free elective.

- These are 40 hour courses with 3 credits.
- The course was popular and very well received, with a score of 0.935, 0.899, 0.958, 0.923 and 0.883 during the last 5 semesters - among the best ratings in the institute.

In 2015, Lakshmi presented an online course “Appreciating Carnatic Music”

This is a 26 hour course for NPTEL (National project for Technology Enhanced Knowledge). It has had a couple of reruns and has had an enthusiastic response. The videos are available online on YouTube. A couple of them are below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C50lNHXE4RY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUOJATvXSM4>

Lakshmi writes regularly for leading publications like The Hindu, Sruti etc. on matters pertaining to the world of performing arts.

- This is an article written around a music performance in the wake of Chennai being included in the Creative Cities Network by UNESCO:
<http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/the-creative-city-tag-and-chennai/article22366912.ece>
- This is an article written about the need for exposure to appreciate any serious music and the peculiar problems in the context of Classical music of India – Carnatic and Hindustani music:
<http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/much-lies-in-the-nuances/article19683009.ece>
- This is a review of a concert by one of the most creative Carnatic musicians today as he experimented singing without any percussive accompaniment:
<http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/tm-krishna-performed-sans-mridangam-for-nadopasana/article19054932.ece>
- She was commissioned an article to give an overview of Carnatic Music for the flagship journal of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. In this article “Carnatic Music: Ruminating the landscape”. She considers some of the tensions and contradictions in the current scenario of Carnatic music.
http://www.iccr.gov.in/sites/default/files/journal_pdfs/Indian_Horizons_vol_60_issue3_july_sept_2013.pdf

Lakshmi is also actively involved in organizing cultural events

- As member of the committee of a Music Club in IITM since 2016, she takes a lead role in selecting and presenting musicians, especially musicians from the North. Recently, in January 2017, she put in place a collaboration between IITM and the prestigious National Centre for The Performing Arts, Mumbai to present musicians from the North in Chennai, something which is usually a challenge because of budget issues.
- She was awarded a grant by the Ministry of Culture, Govt. Of India, in order to present an evening reminiscing and celebrating the music of Pt. Kumar Gandharva, a brilliant Hindustani musician of the last century. The event, widely appreciated, was held on Oct 21, 2017; its review is below.
<http://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/remembering-pt-kumar-gandharva/article19924573.ece>

Lakshmi is deeply interested in the mystic poetry of medieval times in various languages - Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada. Juxtaposing two such voices several centuries and miles apart Lakshmi presented a musical story telling of two women mystics torn in love for the divine. She presented this in a few cities in India to warm reception during 2013 – 2015.

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/music/lakshmi-sreerams-performance-brought-the-words-of-the-two-devotees-to-life/article6360858.ece>

A current Academic project:

A recent project of hers, still underway, is to try to understand the process of music making and appreciating Carnatic music using categories of linguistic meaning developed in ancient traditions of Sanskrit philosophising on this issue. She presented the kernel of this idea at the conference “Churning of Indology” at Udupi in January 2019.

She is also putting together an online course on “Rasa as an Aesthetic Theory” in which she will present the development of the theory of Rasa in the Sanskrit tradition of *Alankara Sastra*, an enquiry into literary beauty and experience.

Fulbright Scholarship

Lakshmi has been awarded the Fulbright - Nehru Professional and Academic Excellence Fellowship for 2019-2020 under the teaching cum research category. The research component involves a study of improvisation in Jazz. She will be involved with teaching Indian Music particularly the improvisational aspect. The residency will offer her an opportunity to participate in conferences, give lectures and performances. She will be attached to the College of Music, Colorado University, Boulder