Vidwan K. S. Kalidas

A Tradition Carried Forward

A Tribute to the Vidwan, Guru and Custodian

30 October 2026



A Commemorative Volume

A great tradition inherited from his guru, Palani M. Subramania Pillai.
A lifetime devoted to preserving its essence and ensuring that it would live on through generations to come — in his music, teaching and writings.



Mahavidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai

The Innovative Gentle Giant

Editorial

A Tradition Carried Forward

This small volume is our humble tribute to Vidwan K. S. Kalidas, whose life was deeply intertwined with the Palani tradition of mridangam. He inherited from his guru, Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai, not merely a distinctive style of playing, but a musical philosophy, a way of listening, accompanying and teaching. Kalidas devoted his entire life to preserving this great tradition and passing it on to the next generation through dedicated teaching, lectures and writings.

What makes his legacy particularly meaningful is that he did not regard preservation as simply holding on to what he had received. He believed that a tradition must live through those to whom it is transmitted. He nurtured his disciples with great care, encouraged young artistes beyond his own circle, recognised individual talent and helped musicians find their own strengths and voices. The recollections of his disciples and contemporaries included in these pages offer glimpses of the teacher, mentor and human being behind this larger mission.

This compendium brings together a longer account of his musical journey and contributions, his own passionate plea for the preservation of the Palani bani, and tributes from those who knew and learnt from him.

Together, they seek to emphasise not only the artiste and guru that Kalidas was, but also the **custodian** of a musical tradition. Through the disciples he nurtured and the writings he left behind, we see how he worked tirelessly to ensure that the tradition he received would continue to live through the generations that follow.

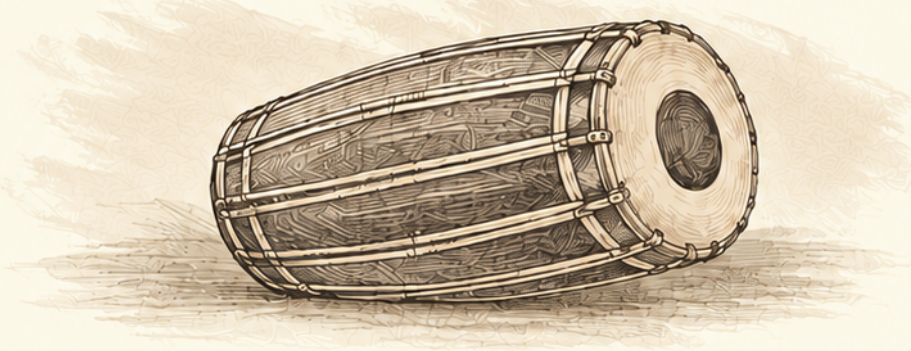
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A tradition lives through those to whom it is transmitted.

My grateful thanks to Dr. Rajshri Ramakrishna for providing glimpses into Kalidas's Lucknow years; to my dear friend Shailesh Ramamurthy, whom Kalidas affectionately called "Gyanasta", for his valuable input and insights; and to Dr. Ashok Kalidas for providing valuable factual information that has enriched this booklet.

Anand S.



Memories of Vid. K. S. Kalidas - Sangita Kalanidhi T. K. Murthy

I first met Sri K. S. Kalidas at Purasawalkam, in the company of his guru, the legendary Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai. Sri Kalidas was deeply involved in assisting his guru in many aspects of his life and work. A vidwan in his own right and a direct disciple of Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai, Sri Kalidas remained throughout his life a devoted follower of his illustrious Guru.

I had the opportunity to attend a few concerts in which Sri K. S. Kalidas performed, and I could readily witness the high order of his vidwat and intellect. There was great mutual respect between us, and we held each other in high esteem.

Both of us have had deep discussions about Sri Palani (whose playing has greatly inspired me). I also remember his gracious invitation to me to be one of the chief guests at the arangetram of one of his students, where eminent vidwans such as Prof T. R. Subramaniam and Vidushi Suguna Varadachari were also chief guests. On a few occasions, I have advised Kalidas's students that they had imbibed a great style and should never change this exclusive style.

In 2008, he invited me to the centenary celebrations of Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai. I was glad to join other eminent vidwans, including Sri M. Balamuralikrishna, Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman and Sri Guruvayur Dorai, in remembering and celebrating the greatness and contributions of Sri Palani.

Sri Kalidas was deeply committed to preserving and propagating the pure Palani bani. In recent years, he produced excellent disciples who have remained remarkably faithful to the Palani tradition. These students are doing well and are performing on some of the most prestigious stages, carrying forward the great legacy of their guru and of Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai.

My heartfelt tribute to this distinguished vidwan and devoted disciple of the great Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai. May his atma attain Shanti!

Mridanga Pitamaha, Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. T. K. Murthy participating in the arangetram of a disciple of Vid. K. S. Kalidas. From left: Vid. K. S. Kalidas, Dr. T. K. Murthy, Prof. T. R. Subramaniam and Vidushi Suguna Varadachari



Vidwan K. S. Kalidas — Custodian of the Palani Tradition

Anand S.

RDSO (Research Designs and Standards Organisation) Colony at Manak Nagar, Lucknow, was one of North India's most distinctive railway townships, bringing together engineers, scientists, specialists and officers from across the country. In 1978, K. S. Kalidas was posted there as Joint Director. By then, he was already a musician of considerable standing. He graduated in Mechanical Engineering from the College of Engineering, Guindy, in 1960, and was a disciple of the legendary Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai. Between 1971 and 1978, he performed in more than 350 concerts, accompanying several leading musicians of the time. He was also a regular performer on All India Radio and Doordarshan.

His transfer to Lucknow therefore took him away from the principal centres of Carnatic music in the South and a flourishing performing career. Yet the music did not leave him.

Rajshri, who grew up alongside his son Ashok Kalidas in Lucknow, remembers how Kalidas brought the Tamil and Telugu families of the colony together for Tyagaraja Aradhana. On Sunday mornings, children gathered at his home to listen to recordings of the great masters of Carnatic music. Through his spool recorder, music that seemed distant and unfamiliar gradually became part of their everyday world, with the voices and playing of great masters of Carnatic music filling the house.

"Through Mama, Carnatic music found a home in a North Indian railway colony," recalls Dr. Rajshri Ramakrishna, former Head of the Department of Music, University of Madras.

He extended the same cultural exposure beyond music. Using a projector, Kalidas showed the children photographs of the Ucchi Pillayar Temple in Trichy, the Brihadeesvarar Temple in Thanjavur and other historic sites, introducing them to sculpture, temple architecture, dynasties and, indirectly, archaeology—another of his abiding passions. "For him, music did not exist in isolation," she says.

In a sense, Kalidas brought an entire cultural consciousness to the RDSO Colony in Lucknow.

The making of a musician

Despite his standing as an important disciple of the legendary Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai, K. S. Kalidas was not widely known personally within the Carnatic music fraternity. Kalidas had never chosen music as a profession; his career was with the Indian Railways, where he rose to become a senior engineer. He also deliberately maintained a low profile in the music world and never sought to promote himself. Yet behind that quiet exterior lay a musician who had immersed himself deeply in the Palani tradition and had, at one stage, been a highly active performer.

His journey began much earlier. In 1956, at about the age of eighteen, while pursuing engineering in Madras, he came under the tutelage of Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai. At a time when serious musical training was largely through the gurukula system, Kalidas was an exception, combining engineering studies with his musical pursuit. Vidwan Madurai Subramanya Iyer, one of the gurus of the legendary Vidwan G. N. Balasubramaniam (GNB), introduced him to Palani.

Vidwan Subramanya Iyer told Palani, "Here is a boy who has learnt mridangam for five or six years from Vidwan L. V. Vaidyanathan in Calcutta and has already played in concerts." When Kalidas was invited to play, Palani listened appreciatively, but told him that if he wished to learn from him, he

would have to relearn the art—from the very first lesson: *Tha, Thi, Dhom, Nam*, since the Palani *bani* required a fundamentally different approach.

Vidwan L. V. Vaidyanathan was a disciple of Vidwan Chathapuram Subba Iyer, who was also the initial guru of the legendary Vidwan Palghat Mani Iyer.

Kalidas progressed rapidly. He absorbed whatever Palani taught him and, beyond acquiring technical proficiency, began to understand the master's distinctive style and, more importantly, the philosophy underlying it. It was often Palani's wife, Kolar Rajammal, who conveyed what the Master himself had said. 'Anna' (as Sri Palani was affectionately called by his disciples) had reportedly spoken appreciatively of Kalidas's rapid progress, his pleasing tonal quality and the exceptional clarity of his sollu-s.

Palani's teaching was meticulous and deeply systematic. He placed particular emphasis on the hard and soft strokes (*vallinam* and *mellinam*) that give the mridangam its modulation and tonal character —and on the simultaneous striking of the right side (*valanthalai*) and left side (*idanthalai* or *thoppi*) of the instrument. The simultaneous use of both sides, relatively uncommon in many other styles, was an important characteristic of the Palani *bani*.

Over time, Kalidas had become deeply immersed in music. Apart from his lessons with Palani, he attended numerous concerts in Chennai, absorbing the playing of the great masters. His growing preoccupation with music, however, came at a cost: his academic performance suffered, and his grades began to fall. To his great disappointment, he eventually had to discontinue his formal training under Palani. He nevertheless remained connected to his guru's music, attending his concerts or listening to his performances on the radio.

Palani passed away in May 1962, soon after Kalidas had begun his career with the Indian Railways as Assistant Engineer. The loss was devastating. His guru's passing affected him so deeply that he withdrew from music altogether, giving up even his mridangam practice, let alone performing in concerts. He emerged from this self-imposed exile later when he was posted to Coimbatore in 1968, after his friends and local musicians persuaded him to return to music.

After his comeback, Kalidas also auditioned for All India Radio and qualified as a performing artiste. The real turnaround came in 1971, when he was posted to Chennai and settled in Loganathan Colony. During this period, he became closely associated with the Sangeeta Vidwat Samajam in Mylapore. His association with the Samajam gave him the opportunity to meet and interact personally with several eminent musicians of the time, including Vidwan Coimbatore Ramaswami Pillai, Vidwan Kumbakonam Sambasiva Bhagavatar, the Kumbakonam Brothers (Vid. Sankaran and Vid. Viswanathan, disciples of Umayalapuram Swaminatha Iyer and Vid. Ramamurthy), Vidwan Madurai Srinivasan, and Vidwan Palghat Kunjumani, among many others. During that period, Kalidas accompanied leading musicians in Chennai and other centres, performing extensively on stage, on All India Radio and on Doordarshan.

His transfer to Lucknow in 1978, followed by a posting to Delhi in 1983, once again took him away from the principal centres of Carnatic music in the South. But even in the North, he continued to perform for the Carnatic music community, accompanying musicians settled there as well as South Indian artistes visiting the region. However, when he returned to Chennai in 1986, posted as Chief Signal Engineer, his official responsibilities had by then become so intense that he had to give up public concerts, restricting his musical appearances largely to All India Radio and Doordarshan. By this time, he had been upgraded to an A-grade artiste by AIR.

A small recollection from the same period perhaps captures his commitment to the mridangam better than any list of concerts. Dr. Rajshri remembers visiting his office near Chennai Central

Railway Station on one occasion. Sitting on the sofa in his office was his mridangam. Kalidas would bring it with him on his scooter so that he could practise during his lunch break.

He remained closely connected with music, however, and in 2000 travelled to Taipei as part of a musical delegation. An accident during the trip resulted in a serious hip injury, bringing his performing career to an end. The mridangam that had accompanied him through so many stages of his life would no longer be his instrument on the concert platform. The transition from performer to guru had, however, begun much earlier. His first disciple was his son, K. Ashok, who had his *arangetram* in Lucknow in 1982, at the age of fourteen.

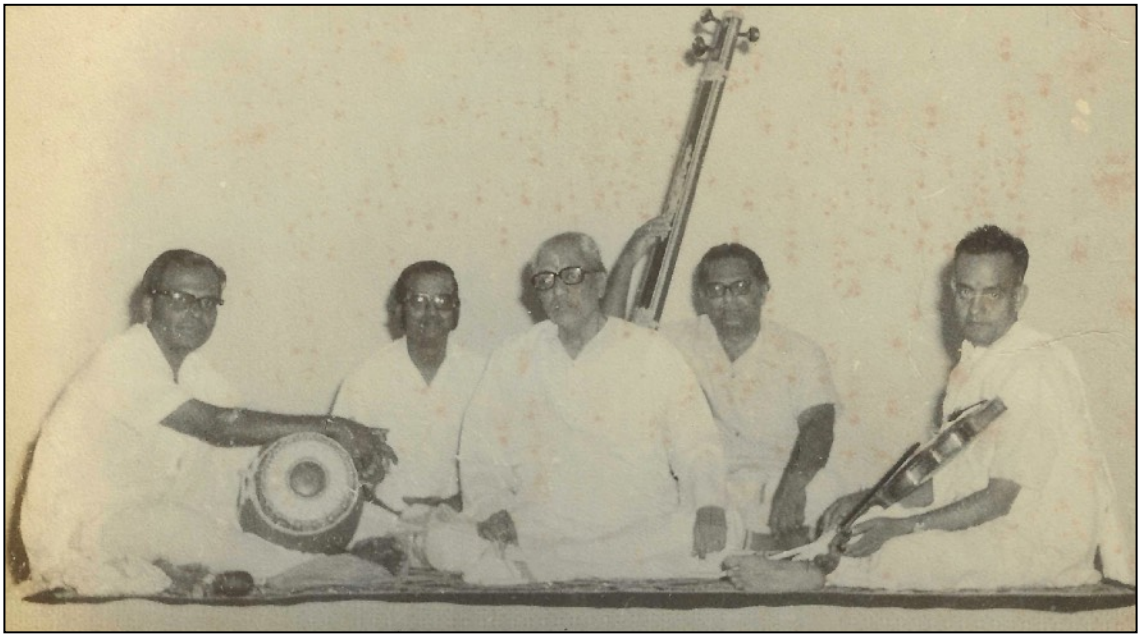
After taking voluntary retirement from the Railways in 1992, he made no attempt to return to the concert stage. He continued to perform occasionally on All India Radio and Doordarshan, but increasingly devoted his energies to teaching a small number of students in the authentic Palani style. Preserving the Palani tradition and transmitting it to the next generation became his consuming passion, as he was acutely conscious that it was in danger of disappearing.

For Kalidas, choosing not to make music his profession had its own advantages. A full-time professional artiste could devote more time to practice, perform frequently and gain extensive concert experience. But Kalidas's financial independence gave him something equally valuable: the freedom to remain true to his musical convictions without having to compromise or pander to popular taste. He would often reinforce this principle with his disciples: never play for the galleries.

After his retirement, his energies increasingly turned to nurturing the next generation. He listened to young musicians with keen interest, mentored and encouraged them, delivered lectures, and wrote significantly on music through his contributions to magazines such as *Sruti* and *Lalitha Kala Tarangini*, while continuing to teach a select group of students.

He continued to attend concerts with keen interest, including those of young artistes, and was a familiar presence in the front rows of many Chennai sabhas. After the concert, he would often offer

Vidwan K. S. Kalidas accompanying Vidwan M. D. Ramanathan with Kandadevi S. Alagiriswamy on violin at Kalpakkam Sangeetha Sabha in 1976



direct and forthright feedback, either in person or over the phone. He would generously invite artistes to his home to practise for important upcoming concerts, sharing what he described as the "tricks of the trade". His encouragement was not confined to his own disciples; he readily helped young and upcoming artistes who sought his guidance. On many occasions, he would directly speak to sabha secretaries and recommend meritorious young artistes. He did not hoard his knowledge, nor did he reserve his encouragement for his own students. He actively looked for talent and helped it find a platform.

Over the years, many artistes who went on to become leading performers benefited from his encouragement, guidance and experience.

What did the Palani bani mean to Kalidas?

An article he wrote in 2020 provides perhaps the clearest answer. Looking back on his musical journey at the age of eighty-two, he wrote of the profound influence that Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai had exerted on him. Although he had learnt under Palani for barely two years, he felt that he had somehow absorbed the essence of his guru's musical philosophy. His admiration for Palani had remained undiminished over six decades. In his own words, Palani's mridangam had "eclipsed all others" and, to him, his guru remained the "SUPREME vidwan".

Writing about his own musical journey, he observed: "My concert career in mridangam was an adjunct to my duties as a railway officer with stops and starts and transfers. But despite all limitations, my passion for keeping the style alive and passing it down to posterity was fierce."

He encouraged his disciples to take the foundation that Palani had provided, develop their own musical personality upon it, and yet remain faithful to the fundamental philosophy of the bani. His concern was that, in the process of musical evolution over time, the distinctive character of the Palani tradition might eventually disappear. He therefore posed a question that was as much a challenge to his contemporaries as it was a statement of his own life's mission:

"Can we afford the extinction of this Mahavidwan's exquisite style?"

The writer and chronicler

Over the years, he built an extraordinary knowledge base of the Palani lineage—not merely of his own guru, Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai, but of the tradition that preceded and shaped Palani. He researched and wrote about Vidwan Pudukkottai Manpoondia Pillai, the towering figure from whom this lineage can be traced; Vidwan Palani Muthiah Pillai, Palani M. Subramania Pillai's father and an accomplished percussionist; Vidwan Pudukkottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai, who profoundly influenced the young Palani; and the many musicians among whom the bani evolved. His 1987 *Sruti* articles on Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai went beyond biographical recollection to examine technical aspects of his playing.

Much of the knowledge available today to the music community about this lineage has been preserved and brought to a wider audience through Kalidas's writings, which collectively encompass an entire musical heritage. Taken together, they provide today's generation with valuable first-hand knowledge of a bygone era.

In that sense, Kalidas became a chronicler of the very tradition he had inherited. His writing complemented his teaching: on the mridangam, he transmitted the tradition to his disciples; through his articles, he transmitted its history and memory to a much wider community of musicians and rasikas.

The importance of this aspect of his work was specifically recognised by the Music Academy when it conferred on him the title Sangita Kala Acharya. Its citation specifically acknowledged him as a serious writer on classical music and noted his detailed analyses of artistes and their styles.

The tradition lives through his disciples

Teaching was perhaps the most direct expression of Kalidas's commitment to preserving the Palani *bani*. He maintained a deliberately small circle of students, teaching them personally and refusing to teach over the internet.

His teaching methods were designed to prepare his disciples holistically for the concert as a whole. Kalidas's instruction was strictly one-to-one, and he did not restrict his disciples' training to *thani avarthanam* alone. He believed that a mridangist had to learn the art of accompanying *kritis* with equal depth—an essential aspect of the Palani tradition. He would often say, "*Thani avarthanam* is less than 10% of the duration of a concert, so a mridangist will have to excel in accompanying compositions." To facilitate this, he would bring a vocalist into the classroom to render *kritis*, especially compositions of the Musical Trinity, and have his disciples accompany them. This was a special aspect of the Palani *bani*, and Kalidas would patiently train his disciples in this manner.

He often said that the concert stage was a greater Guru, one called "experience", and urged his disciples to learn from it. He played videos of their concerts in class, carefully analysing their performances to polish their artistry.

He did more than teach mridangam; he recognised each youngster's potential and guided them towards their strengths. He sometimes encouraged students to pursue vocal music instead, or frankly advised them and their parents to explore other paths if mridangam was not the right fit. **His objective was not to make every student a mridangist, but to help each discover where they could flourish**.

His disciples included Dr. Ashok Kalidas, L. Subramanian, Sumedh Ramakrishna, Akshay Anand, Rohit Ashok and Ajit Ashok, both his grandsons, Sannath Parameshwaran, Samarth Parameshwaran, Muralikrishna and many others. Many of his disciples went on to perform on the concert platform, including at The Music Academy, Madras, with some earning All India Radio grading. Kalidas expected his disciples, when they themselves began teaching, to train students in the Palani style and ensure that its essential character was preserved.

There was another occasion that revealed the depth of his commitment to his disciples. We were to travel from Bengaluru to Chennai for Akshay's class and, knowing that Kalidas was spending his time in hospital caring for his wife, we called to check whether the class would be possible. To our surprise, he said that **the classes must go on** and that he would come home for a couple of hours to teach Akshay. We were prepared to cancel our tickets, but decided to retain our travel plans. The next day, true to his word, Kalidas came home from the hospital and taught Akshay.

It was a small gesture, but one that has remained with us. For Kalidas, the bond between a guru and his disciple carried a sense of responsibility that went well beyond the scheduled hour of a lesson.

Preserving the legacy

In 1999, with the help of others, he rebuilt the shrine of Vidwan Pudukkottai Manpoondia Pillai at Pudukkottai, which had fallen into disrepair after years of neglect. A trust was subsequently established to maintain the shrine and conduct *guru pooja*. He also took over from Vidwan M. N. Kandaswamy Pillai the responsibility for conducting the *guru pooja* for Sri Palani in Chennai. To this day, the guru poojas for Sri Palani in Chennai and Sri Manpoondia Pillai at Pudukkottai continue as annual rituals.

He facilitated the creation of the website *palanisubramaniapillai.org* as a resource for vidwans and rasikas. Kalidas helped *Sruti* bring out a special edition on Palani in June–July 1987. Similarly, a special edition on Palani was brought out for Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, Bangalore, in its magazine *Lalitha Kala Tarangini* in July 2020. Along with M. Ramachandran (Lalitharam), the author, he brought out *Dhruva Nakshatram*, a biographical tribute to the legendary maestro Sri Palani, in December 2011. Bringing out the book had been a major goal for Kalidas for many years, and he greatly encouraged Lalitharam and contributed substantial material to the work. A video DVD on Palani was subsequently produced, with its release following in 2014.

Kalidas never sought honours, yet they came nevertheless. He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Sri Guruvayur Dorai Trust. Sri Thyagaraja Sangeetha Samajam, Mylapore, bestowed on him the title "Sangeeta Seva Nirata". On 1 January 2024, The Music Academy, Madras, conferred on him the coveted title "Sangita Kala Acharya" for the year 2023.

In memory of his Guru — Beyond Music

In an interview published in *Dinamani Isai Malar* 2011–12, Kalidas spoke of his continuing devotion to his guru:

"Even now, I feel strongly that I must do something in memory of my guru."

Kalidas fully funded the construction of a hall at Vasantham, an institution dedicated to caring for and empowering children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and had the hall named after Palani M. Subramania Pillai. It was a deeply personal expression of gratitude to his guru, but one that transformed remembrance into something that would continue to serve others.

For Kalidas, his guru's memory was not something to be preserved in words alone; it was something to be kept alive through meaningful action.

The passing of a revered Guru

On 5 August 2026, Vidwan K. S. Kalidas left for his heavenly abode, bringing to a close a life in which engineering, music, scholarship and service to a tradition were inseparably woven together over 88 years.

The tributes that followed revealed the extraordinary breadth of the void he left behind. For his musical fraternity, he was the devoted disciple of Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai, an accomplished mridangist, an exacting guru and one of the foremost custodians of the Palani tradition. For his students and for young and upcoming artistes, he was a generous and demanding teacher who gave freely of his knowledge. For his Railway colleagues, he was an exceptionally capable engineer of the highest integrity and a respected professional. And for many who knew him personally, he was simply a warm, encouraging and deeply cultured human being.

Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. Trichy Sankaran remembered not merely the musician, but the man who had devoted himself to teaching and to the service of the Guru Palani M. Subramania Pillai Trust.

His passing marked the end of the life of another direct link to the great Palani tradition. But it did not bring that tradition to an end. Through his disciples, his writings, the recordings he preserved and shared, and the institutions and traditions he helped preserve, the musical inheritance he received from Vidwan Palani M. Subramania Pillai continues to live.

Kalidas had once asked, "Can we afford the extinction of this Mahavidwan's exquisite style?" Perhaps the most fitting measure of his life is that he did everything within his means to ensure that the answer would be **NO.**

Tributes & Remembrances

Vidwan K. S. Kalidas

1937–2026

(We were overwhelmed by the tributes received from musicians, disciples, rasikas and Kalidas's professional friends, but could publish only a selected few here due to space constraints. The tributes reproduced in these pages have, in a few instances, been lightly edited and abridged for clarity and space, while preserving the essence and spirit of the original recollections.)

Heartfelt Condolences on the passing away of Sangita Kala Acharya K. S. Kalidas
The Music Academy, Madras, 06 August 2026

The Music Academy condoles the death of Sangita Kala Acharya K. S. Kalidas on 5 August 2026 in Chennai. He was 88.

One of the senior disciples of percussion maestro Palani M. Subramania Pillai, Kalidas was a well-known mridanga vidwan, teacher and writer. He held aloft the Palani School of mridanga playing and celebrated Guru Puja every year with great devotion. He was the recipient of the Sangita Kala Acharya title in 2023.

The Music Academy conveys its heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family and disciples.

Tributes follow:
Karaikudi Subramanian

I was deeply saddened to hear of your father's passing. Please accept my heartfelt condolences.

Your father was a remarkable person. His abiding passion for the mṛdaṅgam, despite the many demands of his professional life, was something I always admired. He was not merely an accomplished artist at the top of his profession; he was a generous soul who selflessly nurtured a love for this great art in so many students. His encouragement, kindness, and philanthropy have left an enduring imprint on the Carnatic music world.

I feel his loss personally. His passing leaves a void that cannot be filled, and his memory will remain with me in deep respect and affection.

My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family at this difficult time. May you find strength in the inspiring life he lived and in the countless lives he touched. May God give you the strength to carry forward his musical legacy.

With affection and prayers,

Murali, Arathi and Apoorva (Muralikrishna)

Please accept our family's heartfelt condolences on the passing of our beloved Guruji, your dear father and revered guru, Sangita Kala Acharya and Mridangam Vidwan Shri K. S. Kalidas. Our humble prayers are with the entire family, relatives and Guru bandhus as you cope with this irreparable loss.

Kalidas Mama touched innumerable lives through his distinguished service as a Railway engineer, his dedication as a guru of the authentic Palani bani, and his guidance to students, disciples and scholars of Carnatic music. His thought-provoking writings and his generous, forthright interactions with fellow musicians and seekers will be fondly remembered and deeply missed.

We can now only pay our humble respects by remembering the glorious and purposeful life he led —one that remains an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing him. May his soul rest in peace.

Vidwan Chitraveena Ravikiran

A great loss for the entire world of culture

Vidwan D Balakrishna
(Son of Sangita Kalanidhi Mysore V. Doreswamy Iyengar)

Very sad. Great teacher. Please convey my condolences to his near and dear ones. May he attain Sangathi

Vidwan Ranganatha Sharma

Oh, so sad to hear this Oum Shanti

Vidushi Jayanthi Kumaresh

What a great loss. Prayers for his peaceful onward journey

Vidushi Shankari Krishnan

Very sorry to hear. Such a great soul Om Shanti.

Vidwan K. R. Ganesh

He has taught mridangam to many students and has been the torchbearer of Palani School. His loss is irreparable. May his soul rest in peace.

Vidwan Ramanujan, mridangam and ghatam artiste from Mysore

Deeply moved and hurt to hear this sad news. A great GURU and an artist par excellence. Torchbearer of Palani School.

Heartfelt condolences to the family members and his students. My humble pranams. May his noble soul attain sadgathi

Om Shanti

Vidwan Arun Prakash

Really sad. He was a great musician in his own right. Our deepest condolences.

Vidwan Mannarkoil Dr J Balaji

I heard the news last night. Kindly accept my deepest reverences and condolences. I am at a loss for words to express the depth of his contribution to the music world.

Vidwan Palakkad Rajaram

Very shocking. A dedicated artist/teacher. A great human. Let the soul rest in peace

K. Venkataramani
Former Railway colleague

It was with great shock and sorrow that I learnt of the passing of my dear friend Kalidas. Please convey my heartfelt condolences to you and your sister.

My association with K. S. Kalidas goes back to 1962, when we were recruited to the Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers in the same batch. I still remember our first handshake in Vadodara when

we assembled for the first phase of our training. We subsequently spent several months together during our training at IRSET, Secunderabad, staying in the same hostel.

We were part of a close-knit group of Tamilian officers, including D. Eshwar, Kanaka Sabapathy, P. Rajagopalan and V. R. Subramanian. We had a wonderful time together, particularly in Secunderabad —full of easy banter, leg-pulling and great fun. Today, only three of us from that group survive.

Kalidas was an exceptionally intelligent and talented individual, a man of many interests and accomplishments. Apart from his love for the mridangam, he had a deep interest in archaeology and museums. Truly, he was a man of many parts.

After I retired and settled in Chennai in 1996, we renewed our contact. Although we did not meet as often as we would have liked, we remained in regular touch over the telephone. The old familiarity remained unchanged—we joked, reminisced and discussed music. Even after I moved to Bengaluru five years ago, our telephone conversations continued.

I spoke to him barely a month before his passing. He had mentioned a fall, but he was cheerful and very much his old self. I had been planning to call him again when the tragic news reached me.

Words can offer only limited solace at such a time. I pray that his soul rests in peace. I will always remember him with affection—as a dear friend of more than six decades.

Remembering Kalidas Mama
Dr. Rajshri Ramakrishna
Former Head, Department of Music, University of Madras

Kalidas Mama, as I always called him, was a fixture in my life from the time I was twelve. I soon realised, however, that he was not just *my* Kalidas Mama. He was Kalidas Mama to the entire faculty of the Department of Indian Music and to all my friends as well.

Such was his warmth, generosity and willingness to mentor anyone who was genuinely interested in music.

I still remember my childhood in Lucknow. He helped the Tamil and Telugu families in the RDSO colony come together to celebrate Tyagaraja Aradhana. Because of him, those gatherings became much more than a function.

That was how we first became familiar with Tyagaraja *kritis*. That was how names like KVN, DKJ, S. Ramanathan, P. S. Narayanaswamy, S. Kalyanaraman and T. R. Subramanyam, among many others, stopped being distant legends and became familiar presences in our home. Through Mama, Carnatic music found a home in a North Indian railway colony.

On Sunday mornings, he would sit us down and have us listen to the stalwarts—Madurai Mani Iyer, GNB, the Alathur Brothers, MDR, Lalgudi, TNK, Palani, Mani Iyer and many others. The music first came to us through his spool recorder.

But music was never his only window into the world. At his home, he had a projector with slides of the Ucchi Pillayar Temple, the Big Temple and many other places. He taught us how to appreciate sculpture. He loved history and its chronology—what came first and what came later. For him, music did not exist in isolation.

I watched him over the years transfer that same music from spool tapes to cassettes, then to CDs and eventually to pen drives. Everything was meticulously labelled in his clear, precise handwriting. Nothing was ever wasted; every recording was a treasure he wanted to preserve and pass on. He generously shared these recordings with young and upcoming musicians. Tapes, notes, contacts, encouragement—whatever you needed, he gave.

Many young musicians would come to his house to practise and prepare for concerts. He would guide them, help them prepare their concert lists and work with them on the *laya* aspects—*kalpana swaras*, *korvais* and *mukthayippus*. He had a remarkable ability to make complex rhythmic ideas understandable to everyone who came to him.

He would say that playing *gumki* on the mridangam was like *gamaka* and *karvai*. He taught us that the mridangam accompanies all the *arudis* in a composition, and not merely the *talam*. Because of this, his students had to memorise the structures of Ata Tala varnams, Adi Tala varnams, Pancharatnams, *svarajatis*, Lalgudi *tillanas* and an ever-expanding list of compositions.

I visited his office near Chennai Central Railway Station a couple of times. On one occasion, I had taken my friend Sankari with me. There, on the sofa in his office, was his mridangam. He would bring it with him on his green Vespa scooter so that he could practise during his lunch break. That was his commitment to the instrument.

His encouragement of young musicians extended beyond his home. He even wrote a series in *Sruti* magazine about upcoming artistes.

He was a strict disciplinarian and practised what he preached. Whether it was his practice, diet or daily walks, everything was governed by discipline. Yet he always found time to attend concerts at the sabhas and listen to young and upcoming musicians. He was a familiar presence in the front row, keeping *talam* through the concert—supporting, listening and encouraging. That was Kalidas Mama.

He believed in doing things the right way. When it came to my own learning, he felt that I should learn from Smt. Rajeswari Padmanabhan and P. S. Narayanaswamy. He had strong convictions about what was right for each person and was never hesitant to say what he believed would serve them best in the long run.

That was Kalidas Mama—deeply committed to music, uncompromising about what he believed was right, generous with his knowledge, and always ready to help those who genuinely wished to learn.

Remembering 'Kali'
K. P. Chandrasekaran
Former Railway colleague

I had the good fortune of being associated with K. S. Kalidas during the final years of my railway service. The Principal Chief Signal and Telecom Engineers often deputed him to important tender committees, where his technical competence and sound judgement were highly regarded. When a supplier challenged a tender decision in the High Court, the committee's sound reasoning helped uphold the process. The Court particularly appreciated extracts from the minutes drafted by the Finance member, who had independently earned a law degree with exceptional distinction.

I need not dwell further on Kali's technical abilities, for they were well known among his railway colleagues. But beyond the Railways, Kalidas—whom we affectionately called Kali—was a highly respected Carnatic mridangam vidwan, teacher, writer and musicologist. Although Kalidas was not as widely known among the general public as Palani M. Subramania Pillai or Palghat Mani Iyer, he was held in very high esteem by musicians and serious rasikas.

I attended a few of Kali's lecture-demonstrations at the Music Academy and at Raga Sudha Hall in Mylapore. The audiences often comprised eminent scholars and musicians, and the discussions that followed were of an exceptionally high order—often going well beyond the understanding of novices like me!

In recognition of his lifetime contribution, the Music Academy conferred on him the Sangita Kala Acharya Award for the year 2023.

A few of us—including the late N. Parthasarathy, K. S. Subramaniam and myself—attended the arangetram of Kali's grandsons and disciples, Ajit and Rohit, both sons of Ashok. His teaching was distinctive, combining exceptional rhythmic precision with imagination.

On his 80th birthday, Kali hosted a simple lunch at his home for all his students, and a few of us were fortunate to join them. What struck me most was the affection and respect his disciples had for him. Some had travelled from as far away as Bengaluru to be present.

In the passing of Kali, we have lost an excellent engineer and a wonderful colleague. The world of music has lost an erudite scholar, dedicated teacher and a passionate guardian of a great tradition.

Remembering Vid. K. S. Kalidas
T. S. Narayanaswamy
95, one of Chennai's senior-most rasikas

I was introduced to Kalidas by my friend, Mr. Chari, a committee member of Karthik Fine Arts, at a musical concert in Chennai. Ever since, we remained in continuous contact—meeting in person, either at his home or at mine, and speaking regularly over the phone. Our friendship extended to the family level, with all my family members knowing Kalidas and holding him in great respect.

I saw Kalidas's deep devotion to his guru, Palani M. Subramania Pillai, and his reverence for Sri Pudukkottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai. He worked to preserve Palani's legacy and organised the Kumbabishekam at Dakshinamurthy Pillai's samadhi in Pudukkottai, to which I was honoured to be invited. I also attended the well-attended birth centenary celebrations of Palani M. Subramania Pillai at Narada Gana Sabha, Chennai, and Kalidas generously shared the video recording with me.

About two decades ago, two family friends of mine were looking for a good mridangam teacher for their sons. Kalidas trained them with great care, and I am happy that both have gone on to become accomplished mridangists. They also reached the senior category at the Music Academy in a remarkably short time.

Akshay is a left-hander, reminiscent of Kalidas's guru. Subramanian is now settled in the USA and has begun teaching students there; one of his disciples is now a professor at IIT Madras. I hope they will both emulate the example of their Guru and continue to participate in the annual Guru Pooja of their guru's guru.

I have heard Kalidas speak with concern about how some disciples of Palani M. Subramania Pillai had, over the years, moved away from the style their master had nurtured—the Palani tradition. I sincerely hope that Kalidas's students will preserve and continue this tradition without losing its essential character.

Kalidas was also a writer and scholar and contributed regularly to *Sruti* magazine. I used to read his articles every month for many years. I can never forget the friendship I shared with Kalidas over all these years. I hope that the name of K. S. Kalidas will remain in the music world for generations to come.

Vid. K. S. Kalidas's Musical Journey



Vidwan K. S. Kalidas honouring Lalgudi Jayaraman on 11 May 2008 during the Palani centenary celebrations, with M. Balamuralikrishna looking on.



Palani centenary celebrations on 11 May 2008. From left: Mannarkoil Balaji, K. S. Kalidas, Lalgudi Jayaraman, M. Balamuralikrishna, Guruvayur Dorai, M. S. Ramanujam, V. Murali, R. Krishnaswamy and Dr. T. K. Murthy.



Vid. K. S. Kalidas with Akkarai Subbalakshmi, Chitravina Ravikiran and Akshay Anand after a concert at Hamsadhwani, Adyar Youth Hostel, on 24 December 2019.



Palani's disciples presenting his portrait to Shanmukhananda Sabha, Delhi, during 1974–75. From left: K. S. Kalidas, Kandaswami Pillai, Coimbatore Ramaswami, the Sabha Secretary, Ramanujam, S. Ramachandran and others. The portrait was installed in the Sabha foyer.



A file photograph from 1982: Vid. K. S. Kalidas accompanying Prof. T. R. Subramaniam in concert, with his son Ashok Kalidas supporting him.



Vid. K. S. Kalidas with his disciples in December 2014 — Top row, from left: Sumedh, Ajit Ashok, K. S. Kalidas, Viswanathan, Ashok and Muralikrishna; bottom row, from left: L. Subramanian, Giridharan, Akshay Anand and Rohit Ashok



At the Manpoondia Pillai Shrine, Pudukkottai, in January 2011. From right: Trichy Tayumanavar, K. S. Kalidas, Madirimangalam Swaminathan, Tiruppur Sridhar Kumar and Akshay Anand.



Release of Dhruva Nakshatram, the book on Palani, in December 2011. K. S. Kalidas, who headed the Palani Trust, conducted the event. Seen in the foreground, from left: Lalitharam, the author; Dr. B. M. Sundaram; Sri V. Murali; Dr. Trichy Sankaran; and Dr. R. Vedavalli.



Vid. K. S. Kalidas during a lecture-demonstration at the TAG Auditorium, Chennai, on 8 December 2013, with L. Subramanian on mridangam and Archana and Aarathi providing vocal support

Palani's Style - can we allow it to become extinct?

Vidwan K. S. Kalidas

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Courtesy: Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, Bangalore

In the process of evolution, the old order perishes and in its place, a new one takes over. This is true of all things in life; indeed civilisations themselves rise and fall. We mourn the past but reconcile with the present.

In classical music, however, the past never entirely dies out but is continuously renewed, refined, or even morphed, but a basic continuity does remain across generations. From the time of Sangeetha Pitamaha Purandaradasa to the present day, the basic format of Carnatic music has remained much the same but peripherally, many things have changed, for better or worse.

In the case of mridangam, speaking for myself, after about 5-6 years of learning and practicing the art in Kolkata, I came under the tutelage of Sri Palani M. Subramania Pillai, when I joined the College of Engineering, Guindy, in 1956. I was with him for but two years due to a clash with my academics but the nuances of his style, the 'vallinam' and 'mellinam', the balance between valanthalai and thoppi, the ghumkis, the arai chapus and the arithmetical patterns that he wove had a magical influence on me. This ONE MRIDANAGAM eclipsed all others and to me, he was the SUPREME vidwan. This position has not changed till now, and at 82, it is not likely to, during the rest of my life.

To those who think that one can absorb the 'secret of secrets' (Guhyād guhyatamam) of a guru's philosophy and style in a period of 2 years, the answer would be a resounding NO, but in my case, it occurred! Probably my 'punyam' earned in the previous 'janma' or guru's "anubhoodhi". Pompous probably, but true nevertheless.

My concert career in mridangam was an adjunct to my duties as a railway officer with stops and starts and transfers. But in spite of all limitations, my passion for keeping the style alive and passing it down to posterity was fierce. As to my fidelity to the master's style, Madras Kannan, Coimbatore Ramaswamy, Guruvayur Dorai, Thanjavur Shankara Iyer, M.A. Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar, D.K. Jayaraman and others have endorsed on various occasions.

Although I had started training a few students more than forty years ago, and my own son, Ashok himself had his arangetram in 1982, an intense period of coaching started only from 2007 when a US-based lad started coming over to India during vacations. I never taught students online, as I do not believe in it. Fortunately, among the 15-odd students who were trained by me after 2007, about half of them have become concert artists and some have even performed in the Music Academy and AIR. The most prominent one is Akshay Anand of Bengaluru, whose dexterity, melodiousness and adherence to Palani's style has been appreciated by all rasikas and vidwans who have heard him. He has been performing continuously in Music Academy for the past 8 years and is graded as an 'A' grade artist of AIR. Following closely behind him is the US boy I spoke of, L. Subramanian, who has since returned to the USA. He had also performed in the Academy for 3 or 4 years and the AIR.

There are others too. I only hope that Ashok and they, in turn, will train younger generations in the same style when they do start teaching.



Vidwan K. S. Kalidas with his disciples at The Music Academy, Madras — from left: L. Subramanian, K. S. Kalidas, Akshay Anand and Rohit Ashok.

My passion for training youngsters in this style (allowing for manodharma) is mainly because although the disciples of Sri Palani did follow the style to the extent they could, the next generation has not exhibited even a semblance of it, although they are busy concert artists with frequent opportunities. This I am saying with full responsibility, and I do not mind who gets offended.

On many occasions, both in print and through lecture-demonstrations, I have tried to educate the public about Sri Palani and his style.

Regarding the times that my guru lived, the transition of music from the traditional music and dance community had been more or less complete with the brahmins taking over; dance followed a few decades later. This, of course, also led to the emergence of Brahmin rasikas, who constituted about 95% of the audience. The non-brahmin communities constituted a minuscule number. The rasikas, promoters, and opinion makers were landlords, media barons, advocates and organisers were all brahmins except for a handful of non-brahmins like Nattukkottai Chettiyars. Sri Palani was always circumspect, serious, parampara-oriented and an undemonstrative vidwan; he never was an exhibitionist and never ever cared for the gallery. He was always a friend of the main vidwan on the stage and was never intimidative. In his community of 'Isai Vellalars' there was no leadership, no opinion-maker, none with any clout. This was the main reason why he did not get the recognition of Institutions and the Government of the day which he richly deserved. In spite of this, he did find a place in the hearts of rasikas, biased or otherwise, only due to his vidwath and melodious playing. This statement of mine should be considered merely from the historical point of view and not from the caste or group angle.

Can we afford the extinction of this Mahavidwan's exquisite style?

Kalidas Mama, My Guru — A Disciple's Recollection

L. Subramanian

Senior Disciple

I first started learning mridangam from Kalidas Mama in 2007, when I was eleven years old. It was T. S. Narayanaswami Mama, one of the senior-most rasikas in Chennai, who referred me to him. Kalidas Mama had not been teaching for some time, but I was fortunate that he agreed to take me

on as a student. What began then became a relationship that lasted nearly twenty years, and it remains one of the greatest privileges of my life.

At the time, I lived in the United States and had been learning from teachers nearby for five or six years. If I wanted to learn from him, Mama had two conditions. First, I would have to travel to Chennai for my lessons. He would not teach over Skype—this was before the days of Zoom! Second, I would have to start again from the very beginning, with "*Tha, Thi, Dhom, Nam*." To Mama, these were not merely basic strokes to be mastered before moving on to more advanced lessons. They were the foundation for understanding the philosophy of the Pudukkottai *bani*.

I would travel to India during my summer vacations, spending roughly twelve weeks in Chennai each year. When I first began learning from Mama, he could no longer sit on the floor. He would sit in a chair and place the mridangam on his lap. Yet, even well into his seventies, he would teach for two to three hours a day, six days a week. The lessons were intense. Each day brought something different, and he had a remarkable ability to challenge me, encourage me, and push me beyond what I thought I could do.

One of Mama's strongest beliefs was that a mridangam artiste was first and foremost an accompanist. During my visits, he would arrange for a vocalist to come to his home, and a significant part of our lessons would be devoted to accompaniment. "Thani avarthanam is only 10% of a concert," he would often remind me.

His approach was wonderfully practical. He would ask the vocalist to sing a piece at least twice. The first time, Mama would accompany, and I would observe. The second time, it would be my turn — and some pieces took several attempts before he was satisfied. Years later, when I began performing and one of those pieces came up in a concert where Mama was present, we would often exchange a quick glance and he would give me a playful smile. Those small moments remain among my fondest memories of learning from him.

Mama held nothing back as a Guru. His teaching extended far beyond the scheduled lesson. After class, he would sometimes have me stay at his home and play recordings of yesteryear musicians, often featuring his own guru, Palani M. Subramania Pillai, on mridangam. He would point out particular phrases and passages and explain the approach behind them. Mama was a regular presence at concerts in Chennai, and he was particularly supportive of younger musicians. When he attended concerts, he would take me along and again point out passages during the performance, often connecting what I was hearing to something he had taught me earlier that day.

He did not simply teach me how to play the mridangam. He also taught me how to listen to and appreciate music.

Mama also had a wonderful way of making his lessons memorable. He was a person of measured proportions — in music and in life. He often spoke about musical embellishments in terms of "*ooruga*" (pickle) on a backdrop of "*thayir sadam*" (curd rice): too much *ooruga*, he would say, would invite stomach pains. He had countless such analogies and anecdotes. Some were about musicians he had known; others were simply stories from his life. They were seamlessly woven into his teaching and made even demanding lessons engaging.

There was nearly a sixty-year age difference between us, yet Mama always found ways to connect with me and keep me interested. Having grown up in the US, I was exposed through him to stories, musicians, traditions and aspects of our culture that I might otherwise never have encountered. I left Chennai each summer having learned much more than mridangam.

In 2011, my family moved to India, first to Bangalore. Later, in 2013, I moved to Chennai for college. This gave me the opportunity to spend much more time with Mama, particularly after my parents

moved back to the United States in 2014. I was fortunate to travel with him on a few occasions, including to Coimbatore and Mysore to accompany his lecture demonstrations. He would also let me stay at his home for several days at a time. We would not only talk about music but also watch cricket and tennis on television. These experiences gave me a glimpse of Mama beyond the formal setting of a Guru and disciple.

Perhaps that is what I will remember most. Mama was never someone who simply gave his students a lesson and sent them home. He shared his knowledge, his experiences, his time and, eventually, his life with us.

Mama was one of the first people I told when I was going to get married. After my marriage, whenever I spoke with Mama, he would first ask about my wife and her health, and later about my daughter, before asking about me. And so, over the years, my relationship with him changed in ways that I could never have imagined when I was eleven years old, sitting in front of him learning "*Tha, Thi, Dhom, Nam*".

From the time I was an eleven-year-old learning the most basic strokes to the time my eighteen-month-old daughter was tearing up papers in his living room, Mama was there, looking on patiently and encouragingly, as a Guru willing to share every ounce of wisdom, knowledge, and affection that he had. I was fortunate to have had nearly two decades with such a Guru, and I will always consider it an honour to have been his student.

Remembering Kalidas Mama

Lalitharam

Author, Chronicler and Digital Creator

It has been several days since we lost mridanga vidwan K. S. Kalidas, one of the foremost disciples of the legendary Palani Subramania Pillai. I have been thinking about him often, and the more I do so, the more I realise how significant a part of my musical sensibility was shaped by him.

When I first met him in my twenties, he was over forty years older than me. I was never his student, yet, in many ways, he became one of my greatest teachers.

He allowed me to sit quietly through his mridangam classes, almost like a fly on the wall. Though I was never formally part of the class, he never treated me as an outsider. Even while teaching his students, he would include me in the conversation, turning every session into an opportunity to help me see and hear something I had previously missed.

There are many things in Carnatic music that cannot be explained through words. They have to be pointed to and experienced. Mama possessed that rare gift. Many times, I would not immediately understand what he was trying to show me. But that never seemed to bother him. He would simply plant a seed. Weeks, months or sometimes years later, I would hear something in a concert or an old recording and suddenly realise what he had been trying to tell me.

Among the many things he told me, one observation has stayed with me: Carnatic music is not really about constantly hearing something we have never heard before.

It is about listening to the same things repeatedly and discovering something new in them as we ourselves evolve.

The compositions remain the same. The rāgas remain the same. Often, even the recordings we return to are the same. What changes is the listener. Perhaps that also explains his own approach to teaching. He was never in a hurry to make anyone understand everything at once. He knew that musical understanding has to ripen.

When I met Mama, he was already in his late sixties. He had heard many of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century in person and had accompanied several of them. With that experience, it would have been easy to retreat into nostalgia about the "good old days."

But that was never who he was.

He revelled in the greatness of the old masters, but his ears were never trapped in the past. He listened to young musicians with genuine excitement, spotted talent and generously spoke about it to others. Through his *Sruti* column, he brought many young artistes to wider attention.

That openness extended to me as well. I wrote my first book, a biography of G. N. Balasubramaniam, when I was twenty-six. Today, I can see many inadequacies in it. Many from his generation did not even bother to read it, dismissing the very idea of someone in his twenties, born fifteen years after GNB's death, writing his biography.

Mama was different. He was delighted that someone from a younger generation was interested in digging into the past. He never used his knowledge to intimidate. He used it to nurture.

It is easy to overlook that Mama himself was an A-Grade artiste of All India Radio, despite never being a full-time musician. His profession was in the Indian Railways; music occupied his life outside it. Yet he hardly ever spoke about his own playing. Conversations would invariably turn to Palani—his music, his aesthetics, his bani and his genius. The greatest joy seemed to come to him when someone praised Palani's playing. It did not matter who was doing the praising. A senior vidwan, a young student or someone hearing Palani seriously for the first time—any recognition of his guru's greatness would bring an almost childlike delight to Mama's face.

Greatness alone, however, does not guarantee remembrance. Keeping an artiste's legacy alive requires sustained effort, often by family or disciples.

For Palani, much credit belongs first to Sri M.N. Kandaswami Pillai, who conducted the annual Guru Pūjā until his passing. After him, Mama formalised these efforts by establishing the Palani Subramania Pillai Trust. Although he had formally learnt from Palani for only about two years, he considered himself a disciple for life. By the time I knew him, keeping the torch of Palani's music burning had become his life's mission.

His search for music was part of that larger impulse to preserve. His career in the Indian Railways took him across the country, and he used those journeys to hunt for recordings. Wherever he went, he looked for collectors and old tapes, searching for music that might otherwise disappear. He patiently built a remarkable personal archive.

What makes this even more special is what he did with that archive later in life. At a time when many collectors guard rare recordings as private possessions, Mama began sharing his treasures freely through his YouTube channel. He had spent years searching for them, but ultimately saw their value in making them available to others. Several recordings that are now accessible to a much wider audience, including the celebrated Madurai Mani Iyer concert from Dindigul, came to light through such efforts. There was no commercial motive or desire for personal glory. He simply wanted the music to be heard.

His work as a documentarian was equally important. For the twenty-fifth anniversary of Palani's passing, he worked extensively on a special issue of *Sruti*, combining his own insights with interviews with stalwarts such as Lalgudi Jayaraman, T.M. Thyagarajan and K.V. Narayanaswamy. Those interviews have today become invaluable historical documents.

During Palani's birth centenary, I had become completely devoted to his music and told Mama that I wanted to write a biography of his guru. He probably possessed more knowledge of Palani than I ever could, and certainly enough material to write the book himself. Yet he was more enthusiastic about my writing it than I was.

He opened his collection to me, spent countless hours playing recordings and explaining their nuances, and introduced me to people who had known Palani. What he gave me was probably enough to write the book. Yet I wanted to do my own research. It took me nearly four years.

Mama was anxious to see the book, but he never became impatient. He gave me the space to write *my* book. When it was finally published, he arranged a wonderful release through the Palani Trust, bought several hundred copies and distributed them among the music community.

As I think about him now, I realise that my debt extends far beyond those hours listening to music. Much of what I value in Carnatic music—what I listen for, what excites me, what moves me—was shaped by those conversations. He never taught me mridangam; instead, he taught me how to listen.

Perhaps that is why, even after several days, his absence has not quite settled into a final shape in my mind. So many of the insights Mama shared with me did not reveal themselves immediately. They stayed dormant for months, sometimes years, before blossoming into understanding.

I suspect I will keep discovering, for a long time to come, just how deeply he shaped the way I listen, the way I think about music and even the way I approach my own work.

Sri KSK Mama - A Warm Presence, Forever Remembered

Shailesh Ramamurthy

Flautist and Music Researcher

I cherish the association I had with Sangita Kala Acharya Sri K. S. Kalidas - "KSK Mama" - the direct disciple of Sri Palani Subramania Pillai. My association with him, in a sense, began much before I actually met him. In 1987, as a teenager, I came across his writing themed on Sri Palani in *Sruti* magazine. His name remained etched in my mind from those days.

It was only much later, around 2008, that I was formally introduced to him through a close friend, Mr S. Anand, the father of the young talent Chi. Akshay Anand, who had started learning mridangam from KSK Mama.

I interacted with KSK Mama on several occasions thereafter, and every interaction opened up some new avenue of conversation. We discovered, with some delight, that he and my father had both studied at Guindy Engineering College, almost at the same time, though in different branches. When both of them attended one of my concerts, KSK Mama mentioned to my father with great

happiness, "I am one year senior to you in age, and one year your junior at Guindy." He said this with his characteristic, disarming smile.

Our musical discussions often moved into fascinating areas. In one of our discussions, he mentioned that a Tiruppugazh incorporates the sounds of percussion instruments. On checking the texts, I came across the Tiruppugazh '*Ninadhu Thiruvadi*', in which the sounds of instruments such as the maddalam, idakkai, othu, thudi (udukkai) and tavil are captured through evocative onomatopoeia, and he was happy and added that this attested to the antiquity of thavil. In our numerous musical conversations, he would offer insights and share his own deep knowledge in the field of Pudukkottai bani, always speaking with the warmth and informality of a friend, and also ask questions on various compositions and *Raga-s*. This was particularly touching to me, considering that he was my father's contemporary and, for me, very much virtually, in a *guru-sthanam*.

KSK Mama had lived through a significant period of recent Carnatic music's performed history and had personally known many of its important practitioners. His recollections brought that world alive. Our discussions once covered the music of Sri Turaiyur Rajagopala Sarma's 78 rpm-s. What followed was a wonderful glimpse into KSK Mama's own musical memories. He recalled that his association with the Samajam had given him opportunities to personally know and interact with a remarkable number of eminent musicians, including great Vidwans Sri Turaiyur Rajagopala Sarma, Kalakkad Ramanarayana Iyer, Kumbakonam Sambasiva Bhagavatar, the Kumbakonam Brothers, Cheenakkutti (Madurai Srinivasan), Coimbatore Ramaswami Pillai and Palghat Kunjumani. He also recalled hearing a concert in which Sri Thanjavur T. D. Sankara Iyer played the violin, noting that the vidwan was already quite senior even then. After sharing these memories, he sent a message, "Thanks for rekindling my memories!"

His YouTube channel also contains endearing interviews he has had with Mahavidwans Sri Lalgudi and Sri KVN in 1987, focussing on their experiences with his Guru, beautifully reflect the affection, warmth, and deep respect these legends held for him.

In our discussions, I once brought up the truly classical music of Veena Vidushi Smt Kalpakam Swaminathan. I humbly shared how the numerous musical interactions I was blessed to have with Kalpakam Mami gave me access to authentic versions of Sri Dikshitar's compositions. I was particularly struck by how closely her renditions aligned with the versions documented in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini (SSP), even though she had learnt them from her guru, Sri Ananthakrishna Iyer, through the *gurumukha* tradition, and not from the SSP book itself. He immediately mentioned that he knew her personally, greatly admired her, had accompanied her in a concert broadcast over AIR, Madras, and had heard her perform on several occasions. In a follow-up email, he said he found the write-ups on a thematic CD inlay booklet on the compositions of Sri Dikshitar covered therein (authored by yours truly, which I shared with him for his reading) very informative, requesting a copy of that double-CD.

Upon his suggestion, I had also written an article on Sri Palani for *Lalitha Kala Tarangini*. The endeavour focussed on some of the bani's technical features, particularly in relation to laya. I would discuss many *korvai-s* and *thathakaarams* found in the recordings of the legend, seeking confirmation of certain analysis points of mine, much to KSK Mama's delight. KSK Mama was very appreciative of the article (which had embedded links to audio examples), and suggested that such content needs to be made easily accessible to aspirants via the internet.

I am sharing the following few instances of his comments solely to illustrate the nature of his constructive feedback, and not to draw any attention to my humble renditions at all. Though he belonged to the old school, where it was not typical to express praise openly, he offered kind and encouraging words of appreciation for some of my flute concerts that he graciously attended, describing the music as 'chaste and free of gimmicks'. After hearing me play certain compositions,

he would suggest others that he wished to hear. On one such occasion, he wrote that he was "a very greedy person" and would keep asking for more, naming *Dakshinamurte*, *Maanasaguruguha*, *Namakusuma* and *Sri Subramanyaya*. On separate occasions, he also telephoned me with specific suggestions - *Dakshinamurte (s'ankarabharanam)* and *Dachukovalena* in *todi (*on another occasion) both in Misra Jhampai. On another occasion, after hearing my rendition of *Pahimam Ratnaachala* in Mukhari, in which his son Dr Ashok (also a brilliant technologist) played the mridangam, he appreciated it and expressed a wish to hear *Ema Ninne* in Mukhari in a future concert. In another concert, inspired by the moment and seeking tonal (*swara-category*) variety, I spontaneously additionally included a *Rishabhapriya* alapana and Sri Tyagaraja's *Mahima Taggincu*. KSK Mama observed that, given the concert's 15-minute delay which was beyond anyone's control, if there happened to be further end-time constraints, he (for one) would have omitted *Mahima Taggincu*, since he considered it less consequential (in the passing, recalling Sri Madurai Srirangam Iyengar's rendition of the *krti* in a positive manner) than the grand Todi and the composition that followed. On another occasion, he positively appreciated my *Naamades'i* alapana and Sri Dikshitar's *Narmada Kaveri*. I had initially assumed, given his generation, that he might be less receptive to ragas such as *Rishabhapriya* and *Naamades'i* which are less frequently rendered, but I now realise that his feedback revealed a nuanced perspective, shaped by context and concert-time-planning rather than fixed preferences.

There was another side to him that I discovered during a visit to his home. I had called on him with my wife and had taken along a few general Tamil books for him to read. My wife was quite astonished to discover the breadth of his knowledge when the conversation moved beyond music. He spoke with remarkable familiarity and insight about politics, society, history and many other subjects. His curiosity was clearly not confined to music; he had an informed view of the world around him.

A few months before KSK Mama passed away, I happened to obtain an image of an autograph of his Guru, Sri Palani Subramanya Pillai, and shared the image with him. He wrote back, delighted, that he knew his Guru's signature very well, having handled much of Sri Palani's correspondence during his lifetime. This would have been a memory from nearly seven decades earlier, yet the signature was instantly familiar to him - a touching glimpse of how vividly those memories remained with him even after so many years.

When KSK Mama came to know that Sri Halasyam Iyer, the freedom fighter from Trichy who passed away in the 1950s, happened to be my paternal grandfather, he wrote - "My pranams to the memory of Pujyasree Halasyam Iyer. I remember him from my youth. It is only because of such Desabhaktas that we still do not lose hope."

To my mind, he occupied the revered position of a senior vidwan, virtually in a *guru-sthanam*, and yet interacted with me with the warmth and ease of a friend, in a relationship where we could freely exchange our observations.

On one occasion, after we had spent considerable time together in conversation, he wrote to me with characteristic generosity when I thanked him - "It is I who should thank you for spending so much time with me & I learnt so much from your self-effacing self. I consider myself fortunate in being a friend of yours; this is no exaggeration." These words give me goose-bumps and are precious to me, since I know that the fortunate one was really me!

For his affection, encouragement and intellectual companionship, I remain deeply grateful. My association with KSK Mama is one that I will always cherish.

A Cherished Association

Anand S.

The association between Vidwan K. S. Kalidas and Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (SRLKM), Bengaluru, had an interesting beginning in 2011.

That year, Akshay Anand gave his debut concert in Bengaluru. The auditorium for the occasion was graciously made available by Sri G. V. Krishnaprasad, a distinguished senior patron of music and a good friend of mine. It was during this event that Guru K. S. Kalidas first met Sri G.V. Krishnaprasad, and I had the opportunity to witness the wonderful rapport that developed between them.

During the course of the proceedings, Kalidas spoke about a young musician whom he had identified as possessing exceptional potential. He was convinced that this artiste would, in the years to come, make a significant name in the world of Carnatic music. Sri G. V. Krishnaprasad was impressed by Kalidas's conviction and invited the young musician to perform at Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira.

What followed was an ambitious four-hour concert organised by Sri Krishnaprasad at SRLKM. The concert was a tremendous success. In the years that followed, Kalidas's assessment proved remarkably prescient, as the young vocalist went on to become a highly popular and sought-after musician.

This marked the beginning of a meaningful association between Kalidas and Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira. Sri G.V. Krishnaprasad came to value Kalidas's ability to identify promising young talent and remained in touch with him, frequently seeking his recommendations. Whenever Kalidas identified a musician of exceptional promise, Sri G. V. Krishnaprasad was willing to provide that artiste with an opportunity to perform at SRLKM.

For many such young artistes, an appearance at SRLKM became an important opportunity to make their presence felt before Bengaluru's discerning music audiences.

In this way, the association between Kalidas and Sri G. V. Krishnaprasad brought together two complementary qualities: Kalidas's discerning ability to recognise emerging talent and Krishnaprasad's generosity in providing that talent a platform from which to be heard.

Several musicians who are today among the prominent names of their generation—including vocalists such as Ramakrishnan Murthy, Ashwath Narayanan, Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath, Anahita and Apoorva, Aishwarya Shankar, N. J. Nandini, Vasudha Ravi, Brinda Manickavasagam and Amrutha Murali, as well as scores of accompanying artistes—were among those given opportunities at SRLKM during their formative years, following recommendations from Kalidas.

The association extended beyond the concert platform. When Sri G. V. Krishnaprasad launched his music magazine, *Lalitha Kala Tarangini*, Kalidas readily contributed his insights, knowledge and wide network of connections in the world of music. His guidance and association proved valuable to the endeavour, and the magazine went on to become a successful initiative of Sri G.V. Krishnaprasad.

This association was yet another reflection of Kalidas's lifelong commitment to Carnatic music—not merely as a performer, teacher and custodian of a tradition, but also as a discerning mentor who recognised talent and helped create opportunities for the generations that followed.

Vidwan K. S. Kalidas
1937-2026

Rooted in tradition.
Enriching a generation.
Forever in our hearts.



Vidwan K. S. Kalidas in a lively moment during a lecture-demonstration at The Music Academy, Madras, on 20 December 2013. The session was presided over by Sangita Kalanidhi-designate Vidushi Sudha Raghunathan. Sri Pappu Venugopala Rao, Secretary, The Music Academy, Madras, is also seen in the picture.



At the release of the DVD on Palani M. Subramania Pillai – The Pole Star of the Laya Universe at Narada Gana Sabha, Chennai, on 21 May 2014. From left: Dr. B. M. Sundaram, scholar and writer; Sri R. T. Chari, patron of art, history and heritage; Sri R. Krishnaswamy, Secretary, Narada Gana Sabha; and Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. R. Vedavalli