SALUTATIONS TO MY GLORIOUS GURU, 
PADMASHRI ADYAR K LAKSHMAN SIR

By Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

Padmashri Guru Adyar K Lakshman Sir is truly one of the greatest Bharatanatyam masters of modern times. He is the Param Guru or Pitamah Guru of Yoganjali Natyalayam having been the Guru for Ammaji, as well as both Devasena and myself. We have tried our best to enable Yoganjali Natyalayam right from its inception in 1993 to be a tribute to his teachings by maintaining the dedication to Natya that he has imbied in us by his living example.

I have been privileged to study with Sir from a very tender age as Ammaji started training with him in 1974 and hence I always tagged along when she would go for classes. No wonder that very soon I was dancing to his beats and tunes and despite his having to call me from the tree tops, he never tired of teaching the mischievous boy that I must have been in those days. I remember with a sense of pride and fulfillment dancing for the 10th Anniversary of his Bharata Choodamani and then also for the special felicitation event held when he was awarded the prestigious Sangeeta Nataka Academy Award.

His home and Gurukulam in Gandhi Nagar, Adyar was a sacred temple of Nada and Natya where thousands of young and older students imbied the great culture of Bharatiya Samskriti under his loving and benevolent guidance in true Guru-Sishya Parampara manner. He along with Ramu Sir, Mani Akka and the entire family were the best Gurus one could have as they took great interest in each and every student treating them as a member of the extended Natya family. I was also blessed to be able to dance for his stirring vocals and Nattuvangum that could make even a stone dance! He had understood the essence of Nada and hence all his compositions would be of an invigorating, spiritual nature that transported the performer and their audience into a higher realm of consciousness. Having danced with joy his inimitable compositions like Ananda Natamaaduvar, Parthasaarathy and Govardhana Giridhara with his live orchestration on numerous occasions I can personally vouch for the emotional catharsis and spiritual awakening these compositions brought about in my own inner being.

A few years ago we had organized the premiere of YOGNAT’S MURUGA MURUGA dance
drama and Sir was to be our Chief Guest. It is the universal law that when one sets out to do something, there has to be a test! Usually the test is proportional to your aspiration. We must have set out to do something very big for the challenge came in the form of the “JAL” cyclone that decided to batter the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coast. I have never had so many phone calls from people asking if we were canceling the performance in view of the cyclone! However Swamiji has taught us to rise to the occasion and come rain, hail or even cyclone, the show must go on! On a day when any other ordinary mortal would have said, “Ananda, please excuse me for I cannot come due to the cyclone” I was touched tremendously that Lakshman Sir along with Maami (Mrs. Lakshman) made the tumultuous journey from Chennai by car in the cyclone! No wonder he has been my role model for he proved that a teacher will never let their student down under any circumstances. He has been one of the great personalities of my life, an amazing humane being, one of the very few real “flesh and blood” role models that still radiate such humility and magnanimity.

During the felicitation ceremony Sir expressed his happiness at the growth and development of Ananda Ashram, ICYER and YOGNAT in Pondicherry and expressed his pride at the standard maintained though the hard work of Ammaji and our YOGNAT team. He praised the excellent manner in which Swamiji and Ammaji had brought me up and was so happy that the next generation is going great guns too. The audience burst into laughter when he said, “Ananda being a multifaceted personality will not only heal patients who come to him but will also make them dance with health after that”. To have the blessings of one’s Guru is so important and this was a truly memorable day when we all at YOGNAT could receive such bountiful and hearty blessings from our Divine Guru.

The Guru-Chela relationship is the most special relationship one can have as a conscious human being. The true Chela perceives the Divine through the eyes of the real Guru and the Guru enables the potential divinity in the Chela to manifest in totality. This enables the Chela to make evolutionary leaps in spiritual growth and offers a contentment of spirit, provided through no other relationship. This
relationship is truly beyond words for it is a conglomerate of all relationships in one. Every relationship you can think of: parent-child, child-parent, teacher-student, student-teacher, husband-wife, friend-friend, mentor-mentored and guide-guided. It has the essence of each and every relationship that you can conjure up in your mind and heart. It is a win-win relationship for not only does the Chela benefit, but so does the Guru. Every true Guru wants their Chela to grow beyond them, and in doing so they grow in their own Divinity too.

Sir and his whole family are an integral part of my life. They have been in my life from such a young age that I really have no ‘before and after’ comparative perceptions with regard to their role in my life. I will always consider myself a member of their family and remember with fondness all the special moments I have shared with them. I am ‘What I Am’ thanks to my Gurus, nothing else. They have poured great love, affection and teachings into me with such dedication and devotion to the fine arts that I feel truly and richly blessed. Sir is indeed a human manifestation of the Divine as far as I am concerned. A selfless, generous, endless reservoir of the universal artistic wisdom he has been a loving, yet tough taskmaster giving me a few hard words when needed (to get me down from the trees I would climb in his Bharata Choodamani Gurukulam) and many soft ones too. To strive for perfection has been his message and to bathe in an orgasmic ocean of divine vibration has been the inner experience he has facilitated in me. He and Maami are indeed my foster parents for they have motivated, enhanced, facilitated and stimulated my artistic growth with parental pride and affection.

I still remember the special day in my life in December 1987 when I received a beautiful handwritten letter from Sir congratulating me on my Mridanga Arangetram. He diagrammatically brought out the triumvirate intricate linkage that exists between Carnatic Vocal Music, Natya and Mridangam that result in Nattuvangam and made the statement, “You can be my real
Sishya as you have all three and hence follow the same line”. This letter has been one of the most inspiring messages for my life and has spurred me on to do my best at all times by taking up the creation of music and dance compositions while performing the Nattuvangam. This is a classic example of how a true Guru molds their Sishya to become themselves. Such generosity of spirit and sharing of love is unparalleled and one of the reasons why Sir is a role model and a manifestation of the Divine to me and so many others around the world.

In recent times, his appreciation and constant loving, supportive guidance manifested on numerous occasions when I presented my lyrical, musical and dance compositions at his feet. His stimulation of my intellect and heart has enabled so many compositions to manifest as an ‘Ananda Narthana Margam’ and I offer them all at his feet as a heartfelt Guru Dakshina. Even on the last occasion when Devasena and I visited him on 26th June 2014, he asked me to sing for him and listened keenly to the song, “Aaadi aadi neerey kalaiththeerao” that asks Lord Nataraja why he stopped dancing. In retrospect it seems to me to have been so appropriate for Sir and his monumental life of Natya too. When I presented him with “Saraswati’s Pearls”, he read a few pages with interest and his eyes lit up as I showed him my humble expression of my greatest admiration and gratitude to him. I knew instinctively that it was to be the last time I ever saw him in this body and even as we were leaving, he as usual inquired whether we had partaken of lunch at his home. Such love, such care and such grace has always been his second nature.

It was the greatest blessing for Devasena and I when Sir and Maami drove down from Chennai to attend our wedding on 25th February 2001 and were there to bless us during all the ceremonies right from the evening Janvasam up to the final Aarthi as we left the Mandapam. We were fortunate to be able to receive their blessings and pay our respects of gratitude for their loving blessings and inspiration.
They were also there during the 10th anniversary of YOGNAT in 2003 and blessed little Dhivya Priya Bhavanani who was just a month old at the time. Both Dhivya and Anandraj were also fortunate to receive their blessings during the ‘Muruga Muruga’ Dance Drama in 2010.

People talk about “popularizing” classical music and dance but it is not possible because people do not want to be refined! A great sensitivity is required to ‘feel’ the spirituality of music and Natya but very few have it. We need to be highly refined and sensitive to really understand these arts in their essence and Lakshman Sir was truly a Nada Brahman in this sense. Sir and I were one day discussing the trend of trying to bring classical dance and music art forms “down” to the “masses”. At this point Sir asked a vital question, “Why not to bring the “masses” “up there”, where this music resonates, instead?”

To be a good artist, to be a good musician, you have to be a good human being. Technique is not enough. It is only the “human-ness” that can push us beyond technique in our path of “divine-ness”. There are people out there who can sing good music mechanically, without a soul behind it. They are popular, they sell thousands of copies, they are on magazines. The purpose of art, however, is not this. The purpose of art is to allow humans to achieve “divineness”. That is the real purpose, and unless art elevates us, unless it transforms us, unless it enables us to make that “quantum jump” in evolution, it is not art.

As Yogacharini Sangeeta and I have discussed in our book SARASWATI’S PEARLS, humility and simplicity go together. When I think of Lakshman Sir, I can see a great person with his head firmly planted on his shoulders. A very simple person yet so rich inwardly: simple living/high thinking. There is a sense of contentment in him, and yet the drive for perfection is there. This is a very essential quality. When I think of him, there is a beauty and grace, which has come through the music and dance. Maharishi Patañjali’s concept of Kayasampat, perfection of body, includes the qualities of Rupa-lavanya-bala-vajra-samhananatvani. Rupa, or form, should be beautiful. Artists should be beautiful. According to the Maharishi, perfection of the body implies beauty and grace. Beauty and grace here are not referred to what can result from cosmetic-surgery or pretense. It is the development of inner-beauty manifesting then in a pure manner through the external.
When the heart is pure, beauty and grace will manifest. Sir’s strength comes from the power of conviction, the certainty that we are on the right path, that what we are doing is a bigger process. It also comes from the courage of taking people with you on this path, from being able to apologize and admit when we are wrong. This is the ‘Bala’ that both music and Yoga require. It is not about having good looks, great muscles, or a perfect vocal technique. It is the strength of conviction, which is required in both.

The Guru is one. The teachings needed by different students may be different and may be given in differing ways and in differing situations. However, the only aim is really to foster growth of the spirit. Expansion is the goal. This is an expansion from a limited, finite individuality to an unlimited, infinite universality. It doesn’t matter whether it is music, Yoga or Natya, the Guru just wants the best to flower through their students. And, they help to make it happen. Swami Satchidananda so rightly said, "Don't try to get the teacher into your heart; instead, get the teaching into your heart. Keep it there, and you will feel your master's presence and guidance always." He also reminded us that the teaching is the real teacher. If you follow the teaching, you will always have the teacher with you.

Dearest and most loving Lakshman Sir, I salute you and bow down once again to your lotus feet. May we live you through your grand teachings and may I always be worthy of your love and blessings.
A TRIBUTE TO MY DEAREST NATYA GURUJI, NATYA KALANIDHI
ADYAR K LAKSHMAN SIR COMPOSED AT HIS FEET AS HE LAY IN
STATE AT HIS BHARATA CHOODAMANI IN CHENNAI ON THE
MORNING OF 20TH AUGUST 2014.

Oh blissful guru in such a loving form,
Our dearest Adyar Sri Lakshman
Oh Natya Kalanidhi (reservoir of the great art of dance)
The soulful devotee of the mother Arundale (Rukmini Devi Arundale)
Your jathis could make even a stone dance such was their vigour,
Surrendering to your musical prowess,
Bless us eternally!

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இராகம்: ஸஹானா
தாளம்: ஆதி
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(அன்பன் உேவ)
அந்தப்பெய

குரலனை
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