



The Sabha lost a very dear member of its family, Shyam - a tour de force presence who was found onstage taking care of the exacting stage management responsibilities. All those who have attended programs at the Sabha can never forget his bald pate and his warm broad smile. Destiny chose to take Shyam away early and he will be missed by the Sabha immensely.

Within days of his passing, his mother Rajee Narayan, a well respected Bharatnatyam Guru in Mumbai, also moved on.

Jaishree Rao who is a disciple of Smt. Rajee and thereby a very close friend of Shyam, pens this tribute to her Guru and his son.



*Guru Rajee Narayan conducts the orchestra with Shyamsundar*



*Celebrating Guruj's birthday at SIES School*

*'A mother is she who can take the place of all others but whose place no one else can take.'*

She sat helplessly watching her son struggle to simply lie down and fall asleep. After a long day at the Sabha, when he was on his feet, walking around all the time with not a moment to rest, Shyam would return home, where his mother would wait up for him. Ensuring that he ate his dinner, she would sit up listening to his version of how his day had passed, however late into the night. Then as she would prepare to lie down and sleep, she knew he would struggle through the night. His heart condition made it difficult for him to lie down and he would mostly sleep sitting in a chair with his feet up on another chair, while she looked on, wishing she could help him. After two major heart surgeries for

aortic valve replacement and then a pace-maker, it was nothing short of a miracle that he was alive, she would think and thank the Lord.

### **Lives well lived for the Fine Arts**

Shyamsundar was born with a defective heart. With continual medication, he was able to lead a fairly active life. In his formative years, he learnt music and dance from his mother. At the age of eight, he was conferred the title of Laya Mani by Shri Pithukuli Murugadas, for playing the kanjira. As he turned 25, she taught him fit to accompany her on stage as nattuvanaar.

Theirs was a very special bond.

Guru Rajee Narayan, erstwhile Bharatanatyam guru and mother of Shyamsundar Narayan, accomplished nattuvanaar and stage manager at Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha, were both well-known and well loved by Mumbai's fine arts circle. All through the years, Shyam's knowledge of stagecraft, sound and lighting and many years of experience was a great help to his mother, as he assisted her during her students' dance performances on stage. His entire life had been a long lesson, in learning the intricacies of taala and the sound of his cymbals made every student dancer want to dance.

Through thick and thin, happy and tough times, mother and son lived for each other. When her husband died of cancer in their early years of marriage, Guru Rajee moved to Mumbai with her young son and ailing mother-in-law. Teaching Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music to the aspiring artistes of Mumbai, she was a formidable figure, who quickly earned the respect and love of her contemporaries and her students.

Shyam would often be filled with remorse for not being able to adequately provide for his mother, but she would chide him and assure him that he was doing his best and she was glad to have him by her side. In January 2020, Guru Rajee did her last recording in a studio, of Brahma Jnana Geetam, a collection of songs, deeply Vedantic. At the age of eighty-nine, she was determined to record this for posterity and with Shyam's help and a faithful team to assist her, she was successful. Both, mother and son were unwell, but determined to achieve their goal. Her voice did not let her down, nor did his taalam. The last recording stands witness to their determination to succeed against all odds.

The stage has its own magical allure. Shyam's addiction to stardust kept him on his feet, even when he could barely stand. Even as great artistes continued to seek his support on stage and loving students clamoured for Guruji's attention and teaching, the end drew near. The year 2020 snatched them both away. After a few weeks in the hospital, valiantly battling for life, Shyam passed away on 1st September. The mother's purpose in life remained no more. As humans live, the thread is unwound from the coil, by the shuttle of the loom of Time. Guruji breathed her last on 25th September.

The Shanmukhananda stage will never be quite the same without Shyam. The fine arts fraternity in Mumbai and all over the world will mourn the loss of his mother, this great Vaggeyakara. She bore her great loss with fortitude; unshaken in her bhakti, devotion to the Supreme Lord and her guru, to whom she prayed all her life.

In the words of his song... *deham azhivadillai kiliye ... aekamudan ondradi*

The body does not perish. In acute longing, it merges to become one with the Supreme.

*Jaishree Rao is a Bharat Natyam dancer and also served as Asst. Editor of Shanmukha.*