

Lalitha Kala Tarangini

Premier Quarterly Music Magazine from
Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira

Volume 2018, Issue I

March 2018



- Special Issue on Chembai
- Special supplement on
Veena L Raja Rao and
D Subbaramaiah

- Remembering
Ambujam Krishna
- Sukanya Ramgopal
bestowed with TTK
Award

Ranjani and Gayatri Honoured

The title “Sangeetha Vedantha Dhureena” was presented to Star vocalists Ranjani and Gayatri in the divine presence of “H H Sri Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar” on 11 February 2018.

The title carries a purse of Rs. One Lakh to both Ranjani and Gayatri, a silver medal and a citation. This award is instituted in the memory of the founder Shri. G Vedantha Iyengar who started the institution 63 years ago.



Ranjani and Gayatri with the award Sangeetha Vedantha Dhureena

Left to Right Standing - Dr MR Yogananda - Treasurer, Sri DR Srikantiah - President, Swamiji, Sri GV Krishna Prasad - Hon. Secretary, Smt. Rajashree Yogananda. Sri HR Yathiraj - Vice President

Mar 2018

Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar is the greatest soul to have lived on this planet and be associated with our long musical tradition. He richly contributed to our music for seven long decades. He was probably sent by God specifically to further our great musical tradition. Many Vidwans who lived in the 'Golden Era' of music were benefitted directly or indirectly by Chembai. He was a teacher, guide, and a philosopher and trained many students. Many stalwarts be it TK Govinda Rao, Palghat Mani Iyer, Palani Subramanya Pillai, TV Gopalakrishnan, VV Subramanyam etc. owe their success entirely to him and hold him very high.

He was a cut above the rest in his days and his knowledge of music coupled with his outstanding voice favoured him immensely. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan and gave away a major portion of his earnings to the lord. He was honoured Sangita Kalanidhi in 1951 which is the highest honour for a musician.

We dedicate this edition of the Lalitha Kala Tarangini to one and only Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar.

SRLKM concluded yet another Spring festival and as always it was a treat for the music connoisseurs. Seldom thousand odd rasikas convene for a music concert, which is a testimony to the dedication and sincerity with which festival is conducted year after year. Sangita Kalanidhi Trichy Sankaran performed along with Malladi Brothers that was very well received. It is quite possible that Trichy Sankaran is performing in Bangalore after a decade or so. Needless to say that the conduct of the festival is a charity of the highest order considering that the rasikas are provided free entry to the top musicians of the country.

We have been carrying bygone musicians of Karnataka in every edition. We have already covered doyens like Mysore S Mahadevappa, HV Krishnamurthy, TS Tatachar, Selvapulai Iyengar etc. and in this edition we have covered two

gems Veena L Raja Rao and D Subbaramaiah whose achievements and contributions will make all Kannadigas very proud.

Ambujam Krishna was a great composer of recent times whose centenary year was celebrated a few months back. As a tribute, Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, an authority on the composer has written an article that is a must-read.

We carry an article on the first woman Ghatam artiste Sukanya Ramgopal who received the prestigious TTK award from The Music Academy recently. Her achievements in an otherwise male-dominated layam world is stupendous. She definitely is a role model for all women musicians who want to challenge themselves against all odds. I am sure our youngsters will draw a lot of inspiration from this article.

In this edition, we carry a technical article on MD Ramanathan's music considering many of our readers are practitioners of music or full time musicians. Venkatasubramanian Viraraghavan brings out some very good technical aspects of MDRs music that is worth reading.

The music world lost another doyen in MS Anantharaman. We pay our homage to the departed soul.

Anand S

Contributors - CP Chikkanna, Sreenivasa Rajarao, TR Rajamani, TS Vasanthamadhavi, Rajashree Yoganand, Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, Venkatasubramanian Viraraghava, Anagha Yoganand.

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Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira (SRLKM) founded by Shri. G Vedanta Iyengar in the year 1955 is rendering yeomen service in the field of music. In addition to music classes, music concerts are held all through the year. The significant festivals are Sankaranti and Spring music festivals. Mandira also takes pride in conducting music awareness program, music workshops, Lecture demonstrations etc. Entry to all program conducted by the Mandira is free as the aim of the institution is to enable everyone to listen to the best of the music and to propagate Karnatak Classical Music. SRLKM is a Trustee of Karnataka Fine Arts Council (Regd.) which is a consortium of 10 sabhas in Bangalore.

"Lalitha Kala Tarangini" publication is fostered by Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, disseminates knowledge in the area of Karnatak Classical Music and bring to light talent and excellence in this area. We believe this is just another step towards preserving and promoting this great Indian fine art.

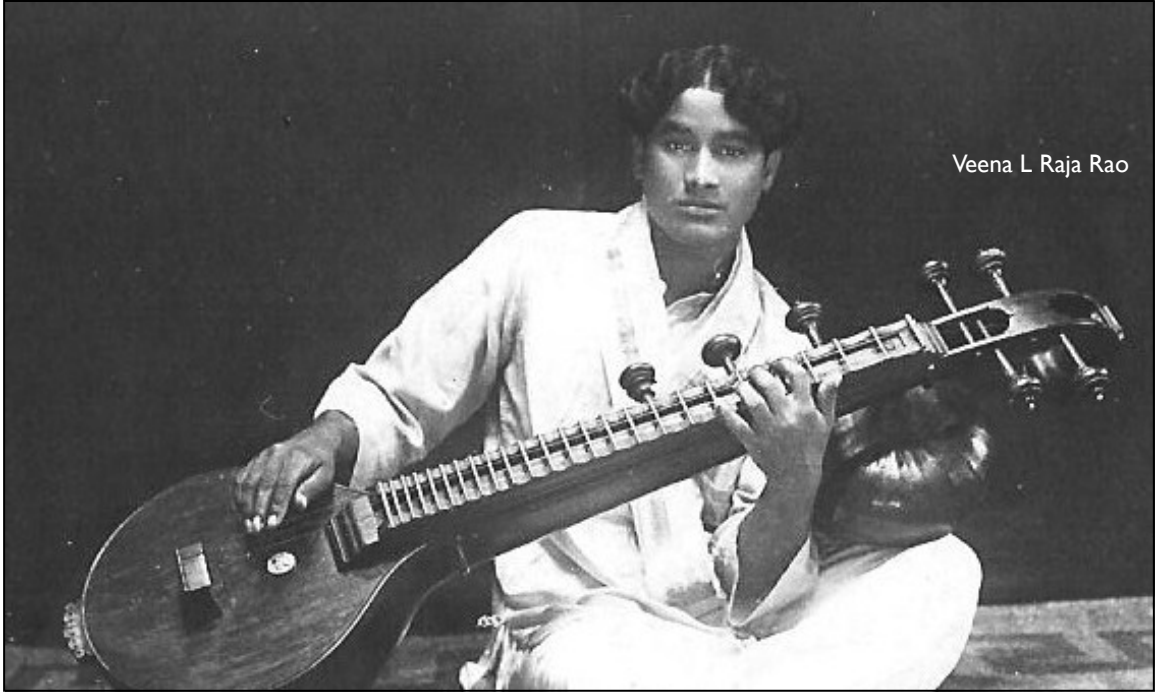
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Veena L Raja Rao

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Lalitha Kala Tarangini - Inbox

To the Editor,

Sir,

The write up on vocal virtuoso the late MD Ramanathan has indeed come out very nicely. The maestro has left indelible memories. I was privileged to enjoy his numerous concerts. During one of his annual Sri Rama Navami concert under the aegis of Bangalore Seshadripuram Ramotsava Samithi, he was presenting Ramayana Raga maalike "Bhavayaami Raghuramam". When he was rendering this, an elderly listener with the traditional Sri Vaishnava three namams, sporting well grown moustache, beard and a tuft got up to leave the sadas, without the etiquette of waiting until the song was completed. MD Ramanathan requested the Brahmin in his inimitable style to remain until he completed the song. He would always bring a mixture of diamond sugar, dried grapes, cardamom grains etc, before the start of his concert, it was customary for him to consume during the concert to

avoid dryness of his extremely sensitive voice. By the time of the mangalam, his stock would be entirely consumed, which was much commented by the enthusiastic listeners in the front row. The article by his son giving tributes was touching.

You have commented about the denial of Sangita Kalanidhi to him by the Music Academy, as if it is a "Bharata Ratna". The award should not be used as a yardstick to assess the Vidwath and the distinguished service of the non recipients, since the award had lost its value long back on account of extraneous considerations than merit as the criteria of selection.

The write-up on Bombay sisters is timely and informative.

With regards
CP Chikkanna

Sir,

Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira lead by one and only revered Sri GV Krishnaprasad and his able team de-

serves all appreciation in their musical endeavours. It is the Lalitha Kala Tarangini, the Quarterly Music Magazine adds colour to the ever remembered organisation which strives only for Carnatic Classical Music.

I would like to mention a few lines about the December, 2017 issue which is as usual a special one about MDR.

Yes, he is special in our hearts. Each article that appears in this issue is a priceless one. The experiences narrated are reminisces-ed among the readers. The photographs chosen carefully bring about the nostalgia of the concerts I listened live and also in the Radio during earlier years.

I wish to add here the two incidents that I witnessed during the two different concerts I attended.

1. The concert was at the Seshadripuram College given under the auspices of the Seshadripuram Rama Seva Samithi way back. I do not remember the year. That evening, Sri MDR chose an elaborate 'Paripalaya paripalaya' in 'Reetigowla' which was at its best. It was a request received by him from a staunch rasika.

Initially, he was hesitant to sing this piece, as his age prevented him to remember certain lines but, at the requests of most of us who were present, he had no choice but to render and in between when he struggled a little bit, a rasika got the lines which he enthusiastically continued and neravals and swaraprastharas he made that night, still lingers in my mind. At the end of the concert, he finished with, as usual, 'Nee nama Rupamulaku' the mangalam. People started getting up and moving out. He stopped singing the mangalam and made an announcement to all the persons to sit again and requested not to leave when mangalam was sung. He was a little upset and started singing the mangalam elaborately with neraval and swarams and he completed in about 20 minutes to the utter surprise of all the rasikas present. Nobody mistook his action, but realised the mistake they had done while walking away when the concert was going to be concluded. I have never head the mangalam being sung for such a long time.

2. The second occasion I remember about the true affection on him by the great artistes of his time is worth mention. Yes, there was a top class concert of the famous Vainika Vidwan Sri S Balachandar in the Malleswaram Sangeetha Sabha, Malleswaram going on. I was also present there. He chose 'Karaharapriya' elaborately and after finishing the alapana and the special thanam, about to start the krithi - 'Pakkala Nilapadi'. He received a small slip from behind, probably from one of the organisers. Suddenly, he stopped playing, stood and in a very choked emotional voice, announced that he was going to stop his concert immediately as he received the



Our Upcoming Programmes

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 08 Apr 2018
Sunday
5.30 pm | SRLKM Auditorium
Dr. R Geetha Bhat (Veena), B
Dhruvaraj (Mridanga), Dayananda
Mohite (Ghata) |
| 13 May 2018
Sunday
5.30 pm | Founders Day at The Bangalore
Gayana Samaja
On our founders day, we recognise
young budding artistes and honour
them with "Raaga Laya Prabha Award".
The Award carries a purse of 25,000
Rs. and a citation. This award is to
commemorate the memory of the
Founder-Director, Karnataka Kalashree
GV Ranganayakamma, GV Neela and
her Sister, Founder-patron and Veena
artiste Dr. GV Vijayalakshmi. |
| | Concert
Abhishek Raghuram (Vocal), Vittal
Rangan (Violin), NC Bharadwaj
(Mridangam), G Guruprasanna
(Khanjira) |
| | 2017 Awardees
BK Raghu (Violin), Kum. Aditi B Prahlad
(Vocal) and Akshay Anand (Mridangam) |
| 10 Jun 2018
Sunday
5.30 pm | SRLKM Auditorium
Jayanta Kumar Das - (Rudraveena)
Jagadeesh Kurthkoti - (Pakhwaj) |
| 07 July 2018
Saturday
5.30 pm | The Bangalore Gayana Samaja
Special programme on Saint Sri
Purandara Dasa
RK Shriramkumar, Amrita Murali,
Ramakrishnan Murthy and Bharathi
Ramasubban (Vocal), Charulatha
Ramanujam (Violin), K Arun Prakash
(Mridanga), Anirudh Atreya (Kanjira) |
| 05 Aug 2018
Sunday
5.30 pm | SRLKM Auditorium
Kalyanapuram S Aravind (Vocal), R
Raghul (Violin), Akshay Anand
(Mridangam) |

message that 'VIDWAN SRI M.D. RAMANATHAN HAS REACHED HEAVENLY ABODE'. He requested all of us to stand up and maintain 2 minutes silence as a mark of respect. He then announced that he cannot play anymore and his reverence to him is unparalleled and he assured the rasikas that he would come shortly in a few days time and perform again a full concert. He wanted to show his respect to MDR in this manner. We were all taken aback. He could have quietly performed and would have announced the sad news after the concert, but he did not do so. That is the stature of MDR and also the great Sri S. Balachandrar.

These two incidents I wanted to share amongst the respective readers and the rasikas alike. I hope some of the rasikas might be still remembering these incidents who might have been present on these two occasions.

Before concluding I would like to place my humble Pranam to the entire team of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira and the Editor in chief and his entire team who meticulously bring out the top class Music Magazine to us.

With deep regards and Pranam,
K SANKAR

To the Editor,

Sir,

The passing away of noted violinist Parur MS Anantaraman aged 94 is a great loss to Carnatic music. He is seven years elder to legendary violinist MS Gopalakrishnan and both were adept in both the systems of Indian

music. In the late 1960's, I was introduced to him by my friend mridangam Vidvan Guruvayur Dorai. At that time, he was the regular accompanist to vocal duo Radha Jayalakshmi and flute duo Sikkil sisters. Earlier to that I had attended a violin trio presented by Sundaram Iyer and his two sons MSA and MSG during late 1950's. I was privileged to attend his violin class in Central College of Carnatic Music in Madras. Noted violinists of Karnataka, Mysore HK Narasimha Murthy and CN Chandrashekar are amongst his students. He was simple in his looks, attire and attitudes and a mountain of patience in teaching. He patiently answered my childish inquiries and guided me to rejoice music. He even defined the differential coefficients and integrals of trigonometric functions $\sinh x$ and $\cosh x$ to my surprise. I later learnt that he was a Mathematics Degree holder from Madras University. He recalled during my visit to his house, how his father imbibed discipline in his sons by putting them to arduous practice after school hours, foregoing playing in their leisure hours. Sundaram Iyer died after being satisfied that his sons scaled Himalayan heights in the field of Indian Music. He had the satisfaction of training his grand children MA Sundareshan, MA Krishnaswamy, M Narmada etc. who have all carved a niche for themselves carrying the flag of Parur Sundaram Iyer's legacy. May Prof. MA Anantaraman's soul rest in peace. Humble pranam to the departed.

Regards,
CP Chikkanna

We have received several phone calls from our readers in the past few months appreciating the article on Vid. MS Sheela published in our June 2017 edition. As a mark of tribute to her family members who stood by her side and supported her journey, we are publishing this family picture (S Anand, Editor).



Tribute to MS Anantharaman

S Anand, Editor

The famed Parur school lost another exponent MS Anantharaman on 19th February. He was 94 and is survived by his sons MA Sundareswaran, MA Krishnaswamy and daughter MA Bhagirathi.

Shri. HK Narasimhamurthy who spent considerable amount of time with the Parur family recounts the vigour with which both MS Anantharaman and his younger brother MS Gopalakrishnan were trained by Parur Sundaram Iyer having shared many a sessions with them.

“MS Anantharaman was associated with Government Music College for 28 years and taught many students. It was a prestige to learn music from that school where TN Krishnan was the HoD and had stalwarts like Ramnad Krishnan, KVN, T Brinda, TMT teaching music” HK

Narasimhamurthy said. He further adds that he spent the best time of his life there during 1967-69.

HK Narasimhamurthy reminisces long hours of practice sessions he used to have with MS Gopalakrishnan, MS Anantharaman and KS Krishnamurthy that used to extend beyond lunch break. He also recollects a marriage concert where he performed along with MS Anantharaman and MA Sundareswaran which was a great experience.

“MS Anantharaman used to perform with MS Subbulakshmi, Radha-Jayalakshmi, KB Sundarambal and he was much appreciated for his accompaniment. He was sincere to the core and all the senior musicians held him very high” said HK Narasimhamurthy.

From Left to Right (Sitting) - Parur MS Gopalakrishnan, Parur Sundaram Iyer, Parur MS Anantharaman with HK Narasimhamurthy standing at the back -Year 1960



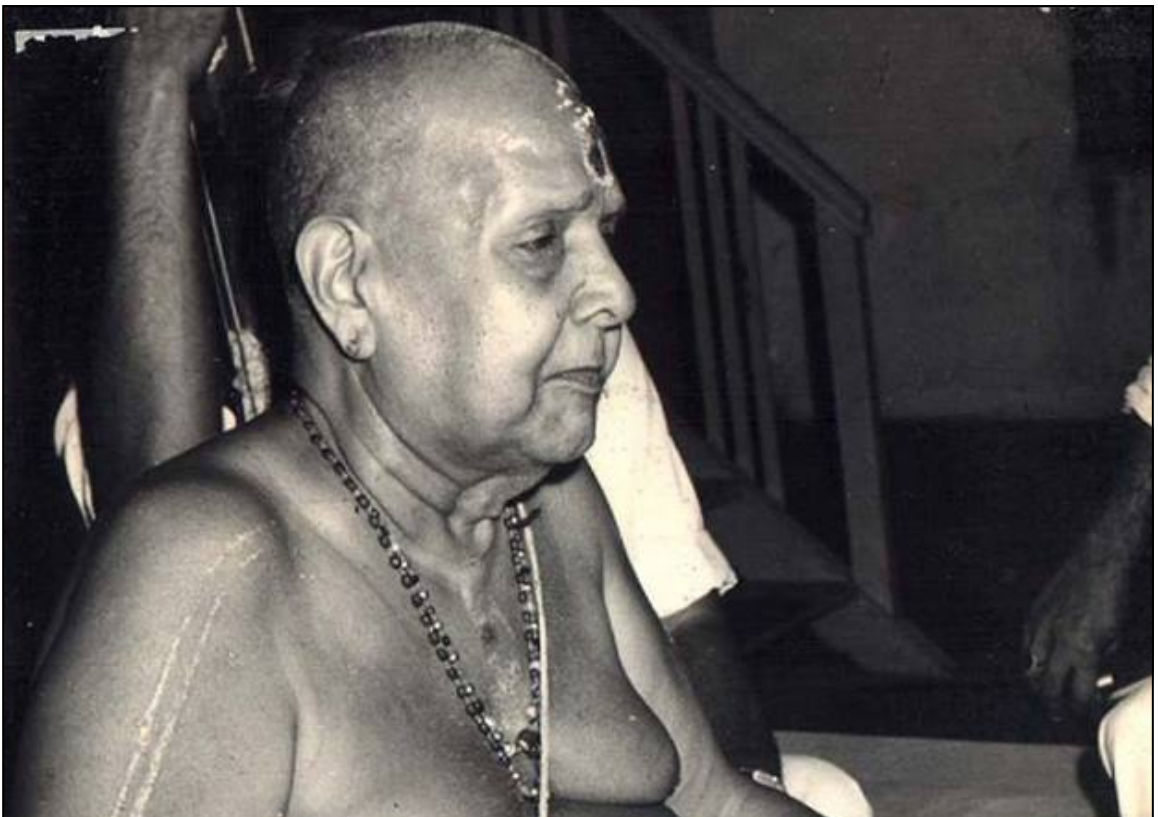
Chembai: The Godfather

CP Chikkanna

The contribution of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, the pitha maha responsible for hoisting many young musicians to fame in the history of Carnatic music is immense. The very name Chembai brings back nostalgic memories of the doyen who ruled Carnatic music as a performer par excellence, an outstanding teacher, a true devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan, an able organiser, a custodian of Hindu Religion and principles etc. He was born in 1896 in an orthodox family with musical tradition in Kerala. He was blessed with a metallic voice that in the mike less era, he sang with a high pitch (5) so that a gathering of over 1000 listeners could enjoy the music! Many stalwart mridangam players like

Palghat Mani Iyer, Palani Subramanya Pillai, TV Gopalakrishnan, Guruvayur Dorai etc. were launched to fame by Chembai besides famed musicians KJ Yesudas, VV Subramanyam etc. My friend mridangam Vidwan Guruvayur Dorai during our journey to Bombay informed me Chembai's large heartedness and sympathy towards 'ilaignars' (youngsters).

When Dorai was 5 years old undergoing mridangam practice under Narayana Pisharody in his native place Guruvayur, Chembai the family friend was visiting his house to teach his sister Ponnammal and Dorai free without any fees. He was given tips by the maestro how to play for



the song, neravals and kalpana swaras while teaching which immensely benefitted the lad. There was no insistence on fingering techniques.

His younger brother Rajamani was put to practice violin by his father with an ambition of accompanying his elder sister Ponnammal in her vocal recitals with Dorai on the mridangam. Under Chembai's guidance, both the brothers and sister made rapid progress. Due to his efforts, Ponnammal earned good name as a performer. The doyen introduced his disciple to his visitors as M.S of Kerala. When Dorai was 7 years old, Chembai performed to his mridangam accompaniment in the famed Krishna Temple at Guruvayur, which was the former's debut. Chembai recommended his disciples Ponnammal and Dorai to several music organisations in Mumbai, Nagpur, Poona etc. He paid Rs.50/- for their expenses and sent them with a recommendation letter to his friend Narasimha Iyer at Coimbatore in 1948 to support them until they established themselves in music arena. In 1949, the duo returned and stayed in Chembai's house in Madras for over two months. Chembai started taking Dorai to accompany him in major festivals in leading organisations. In a concert at Kerala, Dorai was introduced to violin maestro Mysore T. Chowdaiah and Palani Subramanya Pillai in Tripunithura palace. On the request of Chembai, Palani taught Dorai the intricacies and

the techniques mridangam playing for two days. In many concerts of Dorai, Chembai used to attend and encouraged the performers which were an incentive to them. On the recommendation of Chembai, in 1948 Chowdaiah arranged few concerts of Ponnammal and Dorai in Mysore and surrounding places apart from their stay in his house for over a week. He sent his guests to seek the blessings of Asthana Vidwan Muthiah Bhagavatar as a prelude to present them before His Highness, the Maharaja of Mysore. Owing to the indisposition of Bhagavatar, the idea did not work. The next week, Bhagavatar passed away.

Chembai and Chowdaiah were great friends. They were like two bodies and one soul. After Chowdaiah's formal debut in Madras in the early 1920's, he was the most sought after violinist all over South India. In 1922, Chowdaiah accompanied Chembai in Trivandrum and their friendship lasted till the death of Chowdaiah in 1967. Chembai addressed his friend as "Soundiah", Pudukkottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai called him "Mysoriah" and Chowdaiah's host in Madras, Justice Rajarathnam named him "Ghatodgaja"! Whenever Chowdaiah visited Madras, he received royal treatment in the residence of the judge. Chembai was highly sensitive, extraordinarily sharp, and intelligent with presence of mind to solve ticklish problems. He was very careful in financial matters that he could precisely count money even in darkness by the size of the notes using his fingers!

In a marriage concert in the family of a wealthy Zamindar in interior Tamil Nadu, Chowdaiah, Dorai and Alangudi Ramachandran accompanied Chembai. After the concert, the host expressed a desire to listen to Chowdaiah's solo in the same stage. Chembai immediately guessed his intentions of having two concerts at one cost, praised the latter's taste to sky level and mentioned that what all Chowdaiah played that day was only as an accompanist and the connoisseur Zamindar should arrange a separate solo concert and appreciate/enjoy the true potential of the violinist the next day! Accordingly, in the next day's solo recital, Chembai got Chowdaiah



Dakshinamoorthy Pillai-Chembai
Palghat Mani Iyer-1936



Chembai performing with Tiruvaalangu Sundaresha Iyer on Violin, Palani Subramanya Pillai on Mridangam

the same amount he received from the Zamindar for his concert.

Chowdaiah wanted to reciprocate the gesture of Chembai and was waiting for an appropriate opportunity. At that time, a fire caused extensive damage to the Sri Krishna Temple at Guruvayur and Chembai was in the fore front for the renovation. Chowdaiah requested Chembai for few songs in his film "Vani" in which noted actress Pandari Bai made her debut as a child artist asking peanut chikki as her fees! When Chowdaiah paid Chembai Rs.10,000/- for the songs, the latter refused as it was tainted money (Cinema was the culprit). After repeated persuasions, Chembai reluctantly agreed with a condition that the money be sent for the renovation of the Guruvayur Temple.

In his mid 20's, Chembai lost his voice. Any amount of prayers, treatment, pranayamaas, practicing in neck deep cold water in the village pond early morning around 4 am, etc were all futile. Without any alternative, he switched over to violin and acquired sufficient proficiency that he could accompany his contemporary musicians. On one occasion, he accompanied flute Mahalingam too! The speciality of his violin play was that instead of using right hand for passing the bow, he used his left hand with the palm facing upwards and the right hand fingers traversing along the strings! He prayed to Lord Guruvayurappan to restore him his voice and that he would surrender 50% of his earnings to HIM in return. Lo! One fine day, Chembai re-

gained his voice. From then onwards, whatever he earned, he shared it equally with the Lord during his life time. Whenever young musicians offered their respects to him, he blessed them with an advice to perform in the music festival organised by him in the Krishna Temple at Guruvayur during Kartik Ekadashi festival. After all the performances, Chembai's concert was the last around 2 am, before the shayanotsava. This festival acquired important status after his death as "Chembai Music Festival" on the lines of Thyagaraja aradhana festival.

Chembai's launching of Palghat Mani Iyer is very interesting. In the peak of his spectacular career when the field was dominated by Kanchipuram Naina Pillai, Madurai Pushpavanam, Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Bidaram Krishnappa etc., Chembai enjoyed absolute freedom in choosing his accompanists. For a concert in 1935 at Madras, a boy of 12 years as his mridangam accompanist raised the eye brows of the organisers that they remonstrated the choice of the mridangist. Chembai was adamant and even expressed his readiness to cancel the concert, should the organisers interfere with his choice. After the concert, the organisers sought his pardon with utmost remorse for underestimating Palghat Mani Iyer.

The feud between Pudukote Dakshinamurthy Pillai and young Mani Iyer was much discussed. After his formal debut accompanying Chembai at Madras, another concert of the doyen was arranged with Pudukkottai laya wizard playing



Picture from the movie 'Vani' produced by Chowdaiah. Chembai seen here with Chowdaiah on Violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam and Sachidanandam Iyer on Morsing.

Khanjira. When Mani Iyer occupied his seat on the dais with the instrument, he was ordered by Dakshinamurthy Pillai to vacate the place for him and take the back seat. This enraged the lad who openly argued with Pillai, a generation senior to him that he is taking his rightful place as per the established tradition and that he will not obey the latter's dictum. Enraged by this adamant attitude, Pillai's supporters snatched the mridangam, creating a commotion with the weeping Mani stepping down from the dais. Chembai intervened and accommodated him by his side to play. Kumbakonam Raja Manickam Pillai was the violinist. During the tani avar-tanam, Dakshinamurthy Pillai teased Mani Iyer by playing his intricate complex laya patterns and the concluding mukthayas without allowing Mani to play further. Mani Iyer retorted by requesting for the Pallavi and reproduced precisely what all Pillai played!

This continued for a length of time with Chembai enjoying the challenge and counter challenge between the two! Finally, the concert ended to the joy of all. Pillai embraced Mani Iyer and told him that his intention of provoking him was to show the audience young Mani's prowess and deep sense of laya.

In the earlier part of Palani Subramanya Pillai's career, many leading performers never opted for his mridangam accompaniment on account of his complex rhythmic patterns and korvais

landing them into deep traps and embarrassment! Only few musicians like Nayana Pillai, Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer etc. who were blessed with deep knowledge of Vyavaharas performed to Palani's mridangam accompaniment, but none of them were crowd pullers and their concerts were rare! It was Chembai in the peak of his popularity changed the destiny of Palani around 1932. For a concert under the aegis of Madras Music academy, Palani accompanied Chembai. The latter told Palani that he was ready to accommodate him in his concerts and put forth two conditions. The first one is that he should accept whatever remuneration Chembai could pay and secondly, he should avoid complex rhythmic patterns and play for the songs, embellish them (Soukhya Pradhana) and take the concerts to greater height. Palani agreed to these terms and his career took a different turn then onwards. Chembai's advice to up-coming musicians to set deep root in their art with at most perfection and earn good public response instead of running after money is relevant forever. On account of Chembai's guidance to Palani, he became a rage in music circle with leading performers like Ramanuja Iyengar, Madurai Mani Iyer, Alathur brothers, GNB etc.

For a concert in Bombay, Chembai asked Palani to accompany him. The latter declined the offer. When Chembai sought the reason, Palani in-



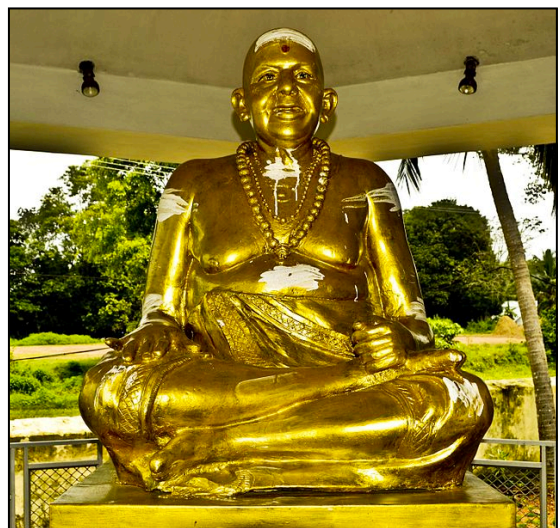
Chembai performing with MS Gopalakrishnan on Violin and Mavellikara Krishnankutty Nair on Mridangam

formed him about the humiliation of being not allowed to play thani avartanam by the main artist in a concert there. Chembai assured him that he will take care of it. When the concert was into 30 minutes, Chembai asked Palani to play thani avartanam. This was followed by another four rounds of thani avartanams at an interval of 45 minutes each in different thalas! The next day's news papers highlighted this concert as 'The Grand Mridangam Concert!'

Chembai was a highly popular performer and never indulged in gimmicks and short cut to fame. His concerts drew full house and the audience were entertained, enlightened and regaled. He never referred to books or paper sheets in his concerts. He presented every composition with pristine purity without diluting/offending the diction irrespective of the language of the song. I still remember his rendering of the song "*Khyati baarada Vastu estiddarenayya*", a composition of Purandaradasa in which the composer has taught us moral lesson and civic behaviour. A typical Chembai's concert was of minimum 4 hours duration and would always start with the traditional Varna "*Viriboni*" in the raga Bhairavi, followed by the popular "*Vaatapi ganapathim*" in *Hamsadhwani*, "*Rakshamam sharanagatham*" in *Ghambeera Natai* in praise of Lord Guruvayurappan, two major ragas and heavy compositions, besides Ragam, Tanam and Pallavi in Bhairavi, in accordance with the age old tradition, ragamalika hymn "*Agre Pashyaami*

tejo" (Narayaniyam) etc. were amongst his concert items.

Sometimes he would paint few sangathis of the raga moaning! His kalpana swaras on few occasions were in saralai and janti varisa! He extracted maximum work from his accompanists. "Accompanying him was always a privilege for us as we could learn a lot from him on the stage" commented violinist Seshagiri Rao. He was always cheerful on and off the stage. In 1974, at the age of 78 he died soon after returning home from his concert due to heart attack. A memorial for him is built in his native Village Chembai.



Veena L Raja Rao - a memoir

Sreenivasa Rajarao

The Early Years

Mysore L Raja Rao (1909-1979) belonged to a lineage of Vainikas patronised by the Odeyar dynasty in Mysore for several generations. Raja Rao's Father Veene Lakshminaranappa (1878 - 1934) also recognised as Bhairavi Lakshminaranappa, a foremost disciple of Veene Seshanna and Mysore Vasudevacharya, was under Nalvadi Krishnaraja Odeyar's patronage. Lakshminaranappa's younger brother Venkata Ramayya was a popular vocalist and an actor. Grand Father Veene Krishnappa and his brother Seenappa, a violinist, were in the courts of Mumtaz Ali Odeyar and Chamaraja Odeyar.

Carrying on the family heritage of Veena playing in the famed Mysore style, young Raja Rao had

rigorous training from his Father Lakshminaranappa in both Vocal and Veena. Growing up during the glory years of Mysore's celebrated status as the grand seat of Carnatic music, Raja Rao imbibed the best characteristics of the doyens of the time – Veene Seshanna, Veene Subbanna and Mysore Vasudevacharya. Tiger Varadachari, who used to spend significant time in Mysore, was a close personal friend of Lakshminaranappa. Young Raja Rao was influenced by Tiger's style as well, but, it was Vasudevacharya who was his idol as a vocalist. Blossoming into a Gayaka, as well as a Vainika of repute, young Raja Rao accompanied the Master on several occasions. Raja Rao's Brother Gopala Rao, eight





Raja Rao in a concert with on Ratnagiri Subba Shastri on Violin and on unknown Mridangist (Veena Sheshanna memorial concert)

years younger, was also emerging in the same mould.

Unfolding Versatility

During his college years, Raja Rao began displaying his versatility as an artiste that was to become his hallmark in the later years. He was the cynosure of the College Union, putting together memorable shows for the Union. Raja Rao exhibited sensational histrionics as an actor, and remarkable creativity and maturity as a music composer and orchestra conductor. Of course, all this was in addition to his performances as a vocalist, a Veena player and a Gamaki! (Gamaka vaachana is vocal musical rendering of verses from classical Kannada works)

Raja Rao moved to Bangalore to pursue further studies at Central College, which was a powerhouse of cultural activities in those days. It was here that Raja Rao began his association with the stalwarts of Kannada literature and Kannada samskruti. It appears the years Raja Rao spent interacting with such giants as B.M.Sri,

CK Venkata Ramaiah, DV Gundappa, AN Krishna Rao (A Na Kru) and close friends, MV Seeta Ramayya and CK Nagaraja Rao, to name a few, was destined to influence Raja Rao's monumental work in the coming years.

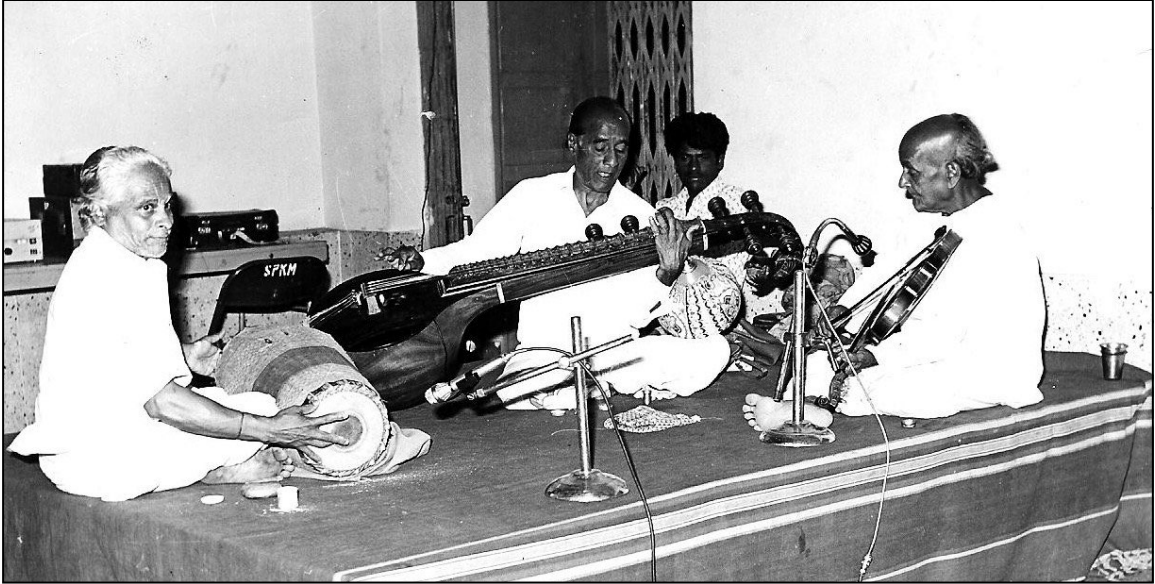
Mysore Brothers – Concert Tours

In 1934, Raja Rao returned to Mysore upon the news of his Father's untimely demise (Lakshmi-

naranappa was only 56 years old). It was only natural that a young Raja Rao expected continuation of the Royal patronage that had been extended uninterrupted to his forefathers for Five generations. It was not meant to be.

During the 1930s, Raja Rao and Gopala Rao began performing as a duo. The pair earned fame as Mysore Brothers and achieved remarkable success in the erstwhile Mysore province and outside as well. They were invited to perform in Madras, Trichy, Mumbai, Poona and Benaras. Radio stations in these cities broadcast their recitals. It was during this time (approx. 1937) that Columbia Records brought out a Gramophone Record, where the brothers have rendered Mysore Vasudevacharya's *Pranatarthi Haram Ahm* in the raga *Jhunjoti*. This album is now available on www.Archive.org and YouTube.

In 1934, highly impressed by Raja Rao's renditions of Mysore Vasudevacharya's compositions, Mr. MV Raghavan, Accountant General of Madras, sponsored Raja Rao on a concert tour lasting Three months, mainly with the objective of popularising Vasudevacharya's compositions in Tamil Nadu. The highlights of this tour were the concerts in Vellore (December 9, 1934), at Madras Music Academy (December 1934) and private recitals for Dr. CV Raman.



Last Concert of Raja Rao with Ratnagiri Subba Shastry on Violin and A Rajachar on Mridangam (08 April 1979)

The Royal Patronage that was not meant to be

In 1937, the Brothers were invited to perform for a private audience with the Maharaja Sri. Nalvadi Krishna Raja Odeyar, a highly reputed music connoisseur himself. The performance was greatly appreciated and the hope of a Royal patronage was once again rekindled. As it turned out, once again, it was not meant to be.

Kannada Sangeeta

Fortunately for us, disappointed as he was, Raja Rao was not disheartened. It is during this phase of his life that we see the emergence of a visionary as well, along side a naturally gifted creative artiste. Raja Rao engaged himself in performing, teaching, experimenting and mastering the nuances of Sangeeta Shastra (Musicology). He applied himself to the cause of Kannada Sangeeta. Another dimension of his creativity, that of a vAggeyakAra Raja Rao, also evolved in this phase of his life.

In documenting the history of Carnatic music in Karnataka, Raja Rao's contributions stand out in two main areas – First, his sincere attempts in promoting Kannada Sangeeta, in the form of his pioneering work of setting musical notations to hundreds of compositions of Haridasas and Shivasharanas, and secondly, during a time when Sangeeta Shastra text books in Kannada language were unavailable, Raja Rao took it upon himself to write, and to publish text books in Kannada.

A long association with the prestigious Kannada Sahitya Parishat had begun, and the Parishat published Raja Rao's first collection of Haridasa's Kritis as early as 1942 (Raja Rao was 33 at that time). Celebrated Kannada writer and poet Dr. DV Gundappa sought Raja Rao's help to set musical notations to his monumental work Antahpura Geetegalu. Raja Rao popularised many of these songs by performing vocal concerts dedicated to songs from this collection.

Additional Haridasa Kritis, Shivasharana Kritis and Basavanna Vachanas were set to musical notations and published by Kannada Sahitya Parishat. Raja Rao trained several hundred students in Kannada sangeeta by teaching at the classes conducted by the Parishat.

Raja Rao continued as a performing artiste, Teacher, Researcher and Author. Recognising the lack of texts in Kannada language pertaining to Sangeeta Shastra, Raja Rao authored and published Sangeeta Shastra Saara and Sangeeta Shastra Chandrike. These two pioneering books are, to this date, much sought after, and are seeing reprints on a regular basis. Bangalore University published another pioneer work Bharatiya Sangeeta Vaadyagalu, a treatise on musical instruments of India (1969).

A popular Teacher

Over the years, Raja Rao had groomed numerous dedicated disciples. Notable amongst them were Ratnagiri Subba Shastry, TN Ramachandra



Raja Rao as an actor - Gadayuddha - Raja Rao as Bheema (Right) and CK Nagaraja Rao as Duryodhana (Left)

Rao, BR Anantha Ramaiah (Violinists); Krishna-murthy and younger Brother L Seshagiri Rao (Veena), CV Nagaraj (vocal and violin), Kolattur Ramakrishna Shastry, CK Shankara Narayana Rao, Malathi, Shyamala Rathnam, Jaya Doreswamy, Vasantha Venugopal, Rajamani Nagaraja Rao are all senior artistes of repute. The founders of famed Prabhat Kalavidaru of Bangalore, Gopinatha Dasa and Jayasimha Dasa were disciples of Raja Rao. From among the next generation, daughter Veena Kinhal (now settled in California), Vijaya Prabhakar (Arizona) and Suma Sudhindra are notable Veena Vidushis.

Raja Rao was invited to set up the music department of APS College in Bangalore (1957) where he continued to teach and train many students for the next 15 years. Vidushis Tara Krishnamurthy (Veena), Vasanthamadhavi, Vasundhara, Sathyavati and others belong to this group.

Raja Rao was a highly respected speaker and was a common feature of musical discussions, lecture demonstrations and music conferences across the state.

Raja Rao was chosen President for the Fourth Music conference of Karnataka GanaKala Parishat (1974). In 1979, Raja Rao was chosen President for the state level music conference organised by Karnataka Sangeeta Nritya Acad-

emy. Raja Rao was entrusted a special project to teach Karnatic music to a batch of American university students who came to Bangalore in the early 1970s.

Any biography of Raja Rao would be incomplete without mentioning Raja Rao, the actor in the role of Bheema in the famed play GadaYuddha (United artists, 1952). Writer C K Nagaraja Rao had played the role of Duryodhana. Raja Rao had excelled in many other roles as an actor and had earned a niche for roles that highlighted the Kannada language spoken in rural parts of the erstwhile Mysore province.

Popular and respected among fellow musicians, Raja Rao was active in founding and promoting organisations like Karnataka Ganakala Parishat. His close association with Kannada Sahitya Parishat and DVG's Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs is legendary.

As a composer

Raja Rao's creativity flourished as a composer as well. In his younger days (1935 – 1942) Raja Rao was a prolific composer. His repertoire includes Swarajatis, Varnas, Kritis and Tillanas. As if to showcase his Kannada pride, majority of his compositions are in Kannada, while a few are in Telugu. CDs with Raja Rao's compositions have been produced, featuring Vid. Nagamani Srinath and Vid. Veena Kinhal.



Veena Raja Rao addressing the Music Conference at Karnataka Ganakala Parishat 1974

A collection of his compositions has been published in 1999, nearly sixty years after they had been created.

A second edition needs to be published to include the eleven (11) kritis and three (3) tillanas that were not in the original collection.

Using the ankita (pen name) puruSHottama, Raja Rao has composed in some rare ragas such as *Kumudapriya*, *Rasasindhu*, *Chamundi*, *Srungaravardhani*, *MargaMohini* and *Pulomika*. It is believed that Raja Rao's compositions in these six ragas are unique as there are no other compositions available in these ragas.

Our loss - lack of recorded music

Discerning patrons and knowledgeable critics have documented that Raja Rao's music represented the best features of Mysore style of Veena playing. They have observed that his forte was in the emotive power of the subtle variations in the manipulation of the Gamakas for which the Veena is noted. They have documented that Raja Rao exhibited remarkable originality and imaginative skills. He was a strict adherer to tradition, and frowned upon loud exhibitionism and excessive arithmetical aberrations.

It is a pity that not much of his recorded music is available. It is regrettable that All India Radio has failed to preserve vintage music from Raja

Rao and many other such masters of his generation.

Awards

Raja Rao received numerous awards and titles in his life time. Premier cultural organisations of Bangalore, Mysore, and other places in Karnataka have conferred awards and titles on him.

Some of the titles bestowed on him include *Sangeeta Vidya Tilaka*, *Raaga Rasaa Bhigna*, *Gaayana Vaadana PraveeNa*, *Gaana Vidya Vishaarada*, *Gaana Kala BhushaNa*.

Honours

1974: President of Fourth Music Conference organised by Karnataka Gaana Kala Parishat, and bestowed the title *Gaana Kalaa BhushaNa*.

1978: Was felicitated by Prabhat Kalavidaru, a reputed Dance-Drama troupe in Karnataka for his contributions in the earlier days of the organisation.

1979: President of Music Conference organised by Karnataka Sangeeta Nritya Academy.

Published works of Veena Raja Rao

1) *Sangeeta Shastra Saara* (First Published in-1962)

This book introduces Carnatic music to a novice student, and helps prepare for the Junior

level examination conducted by the State Music board. This book has seen many reprints due to a great demand, and is due for another reprint.

2) Sangeeta Shastra Chandrike (First Published in 1965)

A widely recognised scholarly text on Carnatic music, is a must for students preparing for Senior level and Proficiency (Vidwat) examinations. The reprint (2005) was published by Karnataka Sangeeta Nritya Academy.

3) Bharateeya Sangeeta Vaadyagalu (Published by Bangalore University in 1969)

A highly celebrated book on musical instruments of India is long over due for a reprint.

Biographies

1) Bhairavi Lakshminara Nappa (1975)

2) Mysore Sadashivarayaru - (1977)

India's premier publishing house India Book House (IBH) commissioned Raja Rao to write life stories of two great artistes who brought fame to Mysore.

The cultural scene of Mysore which was the epicentre of Carnatic music in the early 1900s that a young Raja Rao had witnessed is eloquently recaptured in the above books.

Compositions with Notations (Published by Kannada Saahitya Parishat)

Raja Rao's pioneer work in championing Kannada Sangeeta

1) Haridaasara Kritigalu (1942)

2) Shivashara Nara Kritigalu (1952)

3) Haridaasa Kriti Manjari (1955)

4) Basaveshwara Vachana Gaana Manjari (1970)

Veena Raja Rao's compositions

Published in 1999 and Includes Swarajatis, Var-Nas, and Kritis. This needs to be published again to include eleven (11) more kritis and three (3) tillanas.

Veena Raja Rao memorial award

Veena Raja Rao award has been instituted since the year 2009. Contact rajaraofoundation@gmail.com for more information.

Our Senior Associate Sangeetha Kala Acharya Vid. Neela Ramgopal receiving the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award from Hon. President Ram Nath Kovind.



BVK Shastry on Veena L Raja Rao

(Courtesy BVK Shastry, Prajavani, 9-12-1979,
Translation credit Sachi R Sachidananda)

In the recently concluded Sangeetha Nruthya Academy musical conference, Sri. L. Raja Rao, who presided over the conference, stepped out during the break between two evening concerts, and started chatting in a leisurely way. Suddenly, he broke into village Kannada, in a style spoken in villages around Mysore, Narasipura and Nanjangud. It was a known fact that Sri Raja Rao used to break into this lingo whenever he was overcome with happiness. And his doing so did not arise from his having enacted roles of village lads with names like Kencha and Siddha in college plays. He was also not parodying, in the way a proud man of fine accomplishments would, the speech of the unlettered masses. In fact, it was due to his love for that style of speech rooted in the soil, the naati, pure Kannada, without much Samskrita influences. In his young days, even the upper echelons of Mysore society did not speak in an erudite/high brow way, but their speech was influenced by the naati village tongue. It had a flavour of its own, and this was Sri.Raja Rao's way of recalling, with delight, its memory.

Rooted to the Soil

Thus there was always a strong connect one could see in Sri. Raja Rao, to the Kannada language, culture, and the way of the local people. Even in casual conversations, he would not let pass any slighting remark on the people or artistes of Karnataka. Sometimes he would even flare up. I had occasion to participate once in a Purandara Festival along with him. A senior man of Kannada literature said in his speech that "one should better listen to Purandara Dasa padas from Madras artistes" and named a few musicians. At that moment, you should have seen the expression on Sri. Raja Rao's face.

His body was shaking with emotion. He had to be pacified. We travelled back in the same vehicle. Sri. Raja Rao did not speak even once to

that literary gentleman, despite their friendship. His anger was simmering even after a week. "Did you listen to his words? Do we need any more explanation for why our people are lagging behind? Without knowing our people's merit, without any confidence in our people's abilities, these people have risen to positions of importance and power. If Karnataka is lagging behind in some fields, it is not because of a lack of ability. It is due to a lack of self esteem among such people and our leaders. This is the bad lot of Kannadigas."

Vainika - Writer

70 years ago, Sri. Raja Rao was born into a family of vainikas. He was an accomplished vainika. In his youth, he had performed concerts in many towns, famous sabhas, in the Palace, and so on. He received titles and honours. But he devoted a major part of his life towards the spread of music, and did not confine himself to performing concerts. There are many disciples who have been trained in vocal and Veena music by Sri. Raja Rao. He also taught music at college level. But he was even more effective in serving the cause by means of writing articles and books.

Sri. Raja Rao, who had studied at college and acquired a degree, was endowed with a rare intellectual perspective and sensibility that was lacking in his contemporaries who had also studied at college like him. Among musicians of his times, he was alone in developing a perspective based on his study of the history of music as well as a study of Kannada literature and Karnataka history, leading to a deep understanding of Karnataka's musical tradition and its distinction. As a result, Sri Raja Rao developed a great pride for Karnataka in the realm of Carnatic music. Especially so in its Veena tradition. He had a firm belief that this Veena tradition occupied a high position in the contemporary

musical scenario. "One should not denigrate the other states, at the same time one should not be enamoured of their Veena traditions and forget our own good qualities."

For the sake of Kannada

This line of thought comes through in his articles and books. He has studied deeply the works of Haridasas and Shivadasas. Through those studies he has developed a high reverence for Kannadigas. In order to make these works popular, 37 years ago he collaborated with Kannada Sahitya Parishat and brought out a book with notations titled, "Haridasa Krutigalu". After ten years, the book, "Shiva Sharanara Krutigalu" was also published. In 1966, a few more kritis were published with swara notation called "Haridasa Krutimanjari". Other published works include "Sangita Shastra Sara" and "Sangita Shastra Chandrike". Of course, these were written to cover the syllabus of Karnataka music examinations. But their style is not of school text-books. Their study can be of value even to non-students as they kindle interest in our music.

Magnum Opus

But his major work is "Bharatiya Sangita Vadyagalu". It has been published by Bangalore University. It establishes how Sri. Raja Rao's sensibility was rooted in Kannada soil. Many who

have authored such books on musical instruments have borrowed information as well as technical vocabulary directly from other existing works in other languages.

But it is not so in Sri. Raja Rao's book. Even a cursory reading will reveal how he has understood and experienced the subject before writing. All the technical terms he has employed find current usage in Karnataka. No other book has come out in Kannada at this level on the subject of musical instruments.

A Smile – A Pain

Like the life of a majority of people who wanted to make a living from art alone, Sri. Raja Rao's life too was not that comfortable. His outer smile hid the inner pain. In last year's Honours List announced by the Government, many people were shocked to see Sri. Raja Rao's name listed under the Rs. 250/- category. Many were perplexed how such a slight had happened to Sri. Raja Rao, when the Rs.500 list included names who did not normally merit even an Rs. 100 monthly honorarium. When someone asked him about this, Sri. Raja Rao said, "I had not applied to the Government for any honorarium. If they had not included my name, I would not have complained. Perhaps what happened was just my lot."

Raga Laya Prabha Awardees

Sunday, 13 May 2018
The Bangalore Gayana Samaja



BK Raghu



Aditi B Prahlad



Akshay Anand

Sukanya Ramgopal: Beating the Odds

S Anand, Editor

As we begin our conversation, we go back several decades. While the percussion instrument that paired with the mridangam in the concert stage was looked down upon, one would frown at even the thought of woman playing the Ghatam or Kanjira. There were times when even the doyens of mridangam never allowed the Ghatam or Kanjira to play and participate during the Thani avarthanam. Great exponents of Ghatam like Vikku Sir had to wait forever during the Thani avarthanam for his turn but an opportunity to respond to the mridangam would never materialise. Ghatam, Kanjira and the Morsing are termed 'upapakkavadhyam' (a term that is fast fading in recent days) conveying

a meaning as though it plays a second fiddle to the main Laya vadhya which is 'Mridangam'.

While the girls were allowed to take up instruments like Veena or Violin, it was a taboo for a girl to pursue an instrument like Ghatam. They were just not allowed in these territories dominated by male percussionists. At a time when instruments like Ghatam and Kanjira were treated with contempt, a woman seeking such an instrument was unimaginable.

It is in this adverse scenario that Sukanya Ramgopal challenged herself to learn Ghatam and make a name for herself. While she was proficient in Vocal, Violin, Mridangam and Veena in her childhood days, her heart was craving for

Sukanya Ramgopal receiving the TTK Award from Indira Banerjee, Chief Justice, Madras High Court. N Murali, president, Music Academy, looks on.





Sukanya Ramgopal and her disciples at a workshop at The Music Academy, Chennai (2017 Dec Music Season)

Ghatam. She prevailed upon Vikku Vinayakaram to teach her through his father TR Harihara Sharma. She has never looked back after this and went on to become the first and the best lady Ghatam artiste in the country today having performed with legends like Lalgudi Jayaraman, BM Balamuralikrishna, Palghat Raghu etc.

The Music Academy has recently bestowed on her “TTK Award” given to senior musicians who have made a mark in the field as a musical icon and a guru of repute. Her journey from a humble student in Mayiladuthurai in Tamil Nadu to the current recognition, the TTK Award at the Mecca of music has not been easy. She continues to face the challenges in a male dominated percussion world with even the lady main artistes preferring to have male percussionists.

It was a major concert for a premier Sabha in Bangalore during 1991-92. Sukanya Ramgopal was to accompany a foremost artist and with a senior mridangist. She was shocked to know that the percussionist refused to have her in the team because she was a lady. It was a shame that she had to return back home without having to play and that left a deep wound in her mind. Alas! The wound would shortly turn in to wisdom as the scars kept reminding her to confront the gross injustice.

Her sole aim was to bring the Ghatam and the lady artistes to the centre stage. She wanted to

stand on her own leg and eliminate the dependency. She had seen in Vikku sir’s house “Ghatam Mala” where they were playing layavinyasam using Ghatams of different Srutis. Her thought was to have one person play on all the Ghatam and render compositions that way Ghatam can occupy the centre stage. ‘Ghata Tharang’ was born which is basically a series of Ghatams arranged on a scale of Swarams to produce a particular ragam. From 1992 onwards ‘Ghata Tharang’ has come a long way and she has several concerts to her credit. As a mark of tribute on the international women’s day (17 March 2017), her team of ‘Stree Taal Tarang’ gave a performance at Saraswathi Vidyalayam, BHEL at Trichy with Ghata Tarang being the central instrument. She confesses that those male percussionists or the main artistes who rejected her have done a great service to her as they were instrumental in bringing out her innovation resulting in the discovery of Ghata Tharang.

The book **Sunaadam - The Vikkubaani of Ghatam playing** is a new feather in the cap for Sukanya Ramgopal. It is authored by her and it intends to be a knowledge base for students of Ghatam based on the impeccable Vikku Bani of Ghatam playing. This book contains the fundamental lessons in the four major thalas that is Aadi, Rupaka, Misra Chapu and Kanda Chapu.

In order to promote and popularise the art of playing Ghatam, Sukanya Ramgopal has formed a trust by the name **Sunaadam Charitable Trust** and this Trust staged it's first grand event of presenting 75 Ghatam artists from all over the country on a single stage with Vikku Vinayakram sir leading the group on the stage. The event that unfurled in The Bangalore Gayana Samaja received an unprecedented response from the audience. (Refer December edition of Lalitha Kala Tarangini for details)

Shri. Ramgopal has been a perfect husband to an artiste who challenged everything and made her own path. Engineer by profession and is responsible for what Sukanya Ramgopal is today. He has encouraged her all through her career and has been playing an important role in all her success.

Inspite of constant evolution of our music over several decade, the gender bias among accompanying artiste continues to be a challenge that is not addressed. Several reasons like 'pitch issue', 'personal choice' etc. are quoted but has there been an effort to bring about parity? It is

quite appalling that even the female main performer at times do not opt for lady mridangist.

Our music has undergone a revolution of sort in the recent times with even concert starting with a mangalam or a concert where the main item is a varnam. However, we are still carrying the baggage of ancient prejudice of rejecting the women artistes. Today there are lady artistes who are as good and who can sustain and embellish the concert as good or better than their male counterparts. It is time that the male chauvinism is ended and a new social order in music is brought forth.

For Sukanya Ramgopal, it is a new day every day and she has stopped bothering about the unpleasant things hurled at her. She has always come out triumphant against adverse situations and do not bother about the vagaries of the music echo system. Her recognition (This TTK Award) from the highest authority in music, The Madras Music Academy is a testimony to that.

Hon. President Ram Nath Kovind presents Sangeet Natak Akademi Award to our Senior Associate Mysore Manjunath





Sankranti Music Festival



Spring Music Festival

Memories of Chembai

TR Rajamani (Son of the legendary Palghat Mani Iyer)

Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar was one of the titans of Carnatic Music those days. As a performing mridangam vidwan, along with my father Sri Palakkad Mani Iyer, I got a number of opportunities to accompany Chembai in his concerts as well as to interact with him on a personal level. Chembai was instrumental in laying a firm foundation, for not only my father's career but also the careers of countless other upcoming artists.

My father was ten or eleven years old when he first met Chembai. He had come to our house at my grandfather's invitation. This was around 1921. Chembai at that time was already known throughout South India as one of the leading young performers. He was impressed by my father's mastery over the mridangam and de-

cided to take him on as his accompanist for his future concerts.

During those days, the Bhagavatar was holding an annual music festival at the Parthasarathy Swami Temple in the Chembai village. A concert by Kanchipuram Nayana Pillai was arranged and the mridangist who was to accompany him for some reason, could not make it to the concert and Sri Chembai wanted my father to accompany Sri Nayana Pillai. Pakkiri Pillai was the konnakkol vidwan. Mani Iyer had heard of Nayana Pillai's mastery over laya. In the concert, Nayana Pillai sang a particularly intricate pallavi. My father made a decent effort to gauge the tala structure and succeeded without much difficulty. It was a new experience for my father to accompany Nayana Pillai. Nayana Pillai made

Chembai performing with TK Ramachandran on Violin, Palghat Mani Iyer and TR Rajamani on Mridangam





Chembai performing with Chalakkudy Narayanaswamy on Violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam at a marriage in Coimbatore (17 May 1974)

some derisive remarks about Mani Iyer after the concert, which my father did not take too seriously.

Two months later, it was in Trichy for a sabha concert that Mani Iyer was asked to accompany Sri Nayana Pillai again. Rajamanikkam Pillai was to play the fiddle. Mani Iyer accepted the offer and before going to the concert went to his guru Thanjavur Vaidyanatha Iyer and mentioned to him that he was on his way to Trichy for a concert to accompany Sri Nayana Pillai. Thanjavur Vaidyanatha Iyer said “Oh, it is Nayana Pillai you’re going to accompany. He will create difficulties. He tried some tricks with me by not showing the tala when I accompanied him sometime back. I just stopped playing and kept the mridangam aside. But he cannot do anything to you. You are the electronic brain. Do not have any fear”. Mani Iyer then went and played for Nayana Pillai. Pillai sang a very complicated pallavi and did not show his tala openly. Mani Iyer immediately stopped playing and put his mridangam aside. FG Natesa Iyer, who was sitting among the audience, got up and requested Nayana Pillai not to test the young lad and asked him to put the tala openly. Nayana Pillai relented and Mani Iyer played with gusto, much to the appreciation of Nayana Pillai and all others present. Many years later, Mani Iyer mentioned that he should have tried to play and not

have kept his mridangam aside, but because at that instant, he remembered what his guru had said, he also behaved in a similar manner.

Later Chembai was to sing at a marriage concert in Salem with Mani Iyer. The tavil vidwan Panchami was to play the Kanjira. On arriving at the place, Mani Iyer found that Panchami was seated in his place (usually reserved for the mridangist – to the right of the performer). Panchami Iyer wanted Mani to sit at the back. Mani Iyer was equally unyielding. Chembai said “I will not interfere in this. Settle your disputes yourself”. Someone from the audience told Mani Iyer “Either you play sitting at the back or we’ll take away your mridangam and send you back”. Chembai, who was watching Mani Iyer to see how he would handle the situation, now said in a compromising tone, “Mani, you need not sit at the back. Come here and sit by my side”. So my father performed that day sitting by Chembai’s side.

My father was very dear to Chembai. When some concert organisers used to ask Chembai about his choice for mridangam, invariably his reply would be “If you can arrange for Mani’s mridangam, good; otherwise it does not matter who plays mridangam.” My father also held Chembai in absolute reverence.

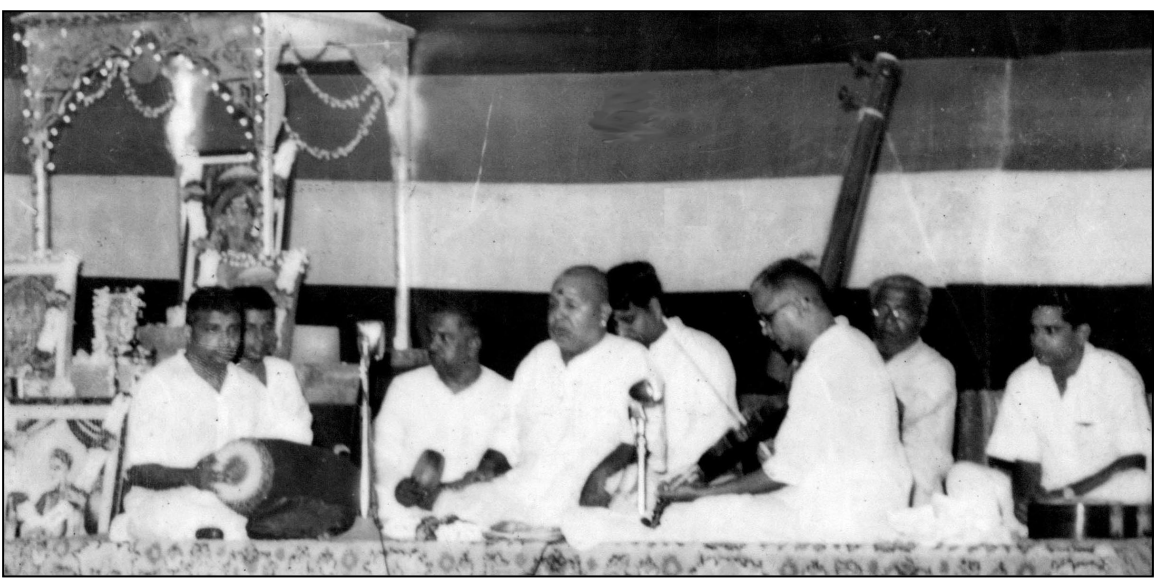


Chembai performing with TN Krishnan on Violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam

There was an unfortunate incident which led to a misunderstanding between my father and Chembai. My father once accompanied MA Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar at the Trivandrum Navarathri Mandapam. My father thought MA Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar deserved much more popularity for all his vidhwat (knowledge). So, when the organisers at the Music Academy asked him whether he could accompany Chembai that year, he said, "Would it not be more beneficial for MA Kalyanakrishna Bhagavatar if I accompanied him instead of Chembai? Word got around to Chembai that Mani Iyer was not interested in accompanying him. This news embittered Chembai and the rift widened as they did not meet each other to sort things out. Later, at the Sashtiabthapoorthi Celebrations of PA Raman Iyer at Bombay, Chembai was to perform. Mani Iyer was also present for the occasion. It was there that Mani Iyer had an opportunity to explain things to Chembai and assure him that he did not have any hard feelings. That brought back the lost rapport and Chembai asked Mani Iyer to accompany him in his concert there, which Mani Iyer did.

My father and Chembai jointly learnt some kritis like *Jesinadella*, *Chetulara* etc. from Karur Chinnaswamy Iyer. My father used to tell me he had a great interest in learning vocal music, and had he not taken to playing mridangam, he would have become a vocalist.

My first opportunity to accompany Chembai was at the Thiruvaiyar Thyagaraja Aradhana. My participation in it was quite unexpected. I had just gone there to listen. The organisers wanted me to participate in accompanying some musician. I accepted and the musician was none other than Chembai. Sri VV Subramanian was providing fiddle support. The concert was being relayed through AIR. The radio authorities had a practice of not announcing the names of artistes who were not auditioned. Chembai, when he heard that my name would not be announced, said "So what?" The concert commenced and he sang '*Endaro Mahanubhavulu*'. Just a few minutes after he started singing, in the middle of the song, Chembai suddenly said "The mridangist who is accompanying me here is Rajamani. He is Palakkad Mani's son. He is an engineer by profession." The radio authorities were shocked. One of them came near and said "Relay is on!" Chembai replied calmly "I know



Chembai performing with Papa Venkataramaiah on Violin, Palghat Mani Iyer on Mridangam and Swaminatha Pillai on Kanjira in Bombay

that”, and proceeded to inform a lot of other details about me over the mike. Later, he told me “I have told all that is there to be told about you in the radio. Are you happy?”

Later I also accompanied Chembai in a concert recorded by the All India Radio in 1963-1964. This was my first radio concert. My father took me to his house two days before that concert. I offered him a veshti and some fruits as a token of my respect and sought his blessings. Since the AIR station was close to Chembai’s house, he asked me to come to his house on the day of the recording and suggested that we all go together. Accordingly, I went to Chembai’s house on that day about an hour before the recording was to commence. Chembai Narayanan was to provide vocal support. We went to the Radio station in Chembai’s car. Sri TN Balappa was to play the dolak for the concert. Chembai told him “Balappa, come here. You want your cheque only, is it not. I’ll get you your cheque. Rajamani is playing in the Radio for the first time today. You need not play at all. I will see that you get your cheque.” When the relay was about to begin, Chembai said “When the red light is switched on, play softly. Don’t be too loud. When the green light glows, play as you wish”. This incident made me feel how much he was interested in my success on the dais.

In 1966 or 67, at the Krishna Gana Sabha, my father and myself were to play mridangam for

Chembai. At the time we were playing the thani, I and my father taking turns, Chembai abruptly said, looking at my father, “Mani, today you will lose.” We did not know what was going on. The audience was equally clueless. Chembai repeated “Mani you will certainly lose today, no matter what”. When asked for an explanation, he said, “Today, if your son plays better than you, you will lose. If you play better than him, it will mean you haven’t taught him properly. So you will lose in either case. You are going to lose”. The audience, in rapt attention till then, applauded greatly in amusement.

It was the occasion of my marriage, when a lot of the front ranking singers like Chembai, Sem-mangudi, Ariyakudi, Musiri, Alathur Brothers, etc agreed to perform and I, my father and Sri Umayalapuram Sivaraman took upon ourselves to accompany them for two concerts each. I was to accompany Chembai. Chowdaiah was at the violin. After the first few songs, Chembai started singing the song ‘Raghuvara’ in an expansive manner. It is generally quite difficult to make the mridangam more audible when the singer is someone like Chembai, and I was trying my best to keep up to Chembai’s voice. When he started singing swaras, I thought he would sing for a few avartanams. So I played with much effort right from the beginning. But Chembai used to stretch the swara for many avartanams and the mridangist will get completely exhausted by the time he comes back to

the kriti. My father, who was listening, is said to have remarked to his friend about me thus "Rajamani is not quite experienced. This is not the way he should strain himself now. The Bhagavatar will keep singing for a very long time. He should play softly now and reserve his energy for the end."

Once I was at the Madras Central Railway Station in 1968. There in a first class compartment of the train, were seated Chembai & Yesudas. On seeing me through the window, Chembai wanted to know why I was there and called me inside. I explained that I had come to see a friend off. Then, he asked Yesudas to fetch some drinking water. After he left, I asked Chembai where he was going. "There is a concert we have in Coimbatore tomorrow", he said. "It is going to be a hundred years concert". I couldn't understand. "A hundred years concert?" I asked. "Yes, a hundred years concert. When we perform tomorrow, the sum of my age and that of Yesudas will be 100". I laughed.

There was this concert of Smt. MS Subbulakshmi that Chembai went to attend with his wife in a Sabha in Madras. The organisers wanted Chembai to felicitate MS by garlanding and blessing her. Chembai did not know what to say, so he asked the organisers to find out whether him garlanding MS was objectionable to her. MS said that she did not find it objectionable in any way. When Chembai heard this, he said "So she does not have any objection. But ask Sadasivam (MS's husband) whether he has any objection to my garlanding her." The organisers came back to report that Sri Sadasivam did not have any objection either. Chembai said "So MS has no objection, Sadasivam has no objection. Now let's ask my wife whether she has any objection." When his wife (Smt. Meenakshi Ammal), who was generally quite reticent in nature, conveyed her no-objection, Chembai observed, "So MS has no objection, Sadasivam does not object, and my wife also does not object, but I do object! She has my blessings but I will not garland her."

There was this unknown violinist who could just play so and so. After some effort in at-

tempting to coach him up to a certain level, Chembai wanted the violinist to accompany him at a concert. In the concert, the violinist found it really difficult to accompany Chembai and was trying his best not to fumble. On noticing his difficulty, Chembai said openly, "You played well at home, why are you afraid when I'm here." Though the words did not help the violinist much, it dispelled the idea among the audience that the violinist was mediocre. Chembai was at work again in trying to prop-up yet another artiste.

In the old days, when Chembai used to pay Rs. 50 per concert for violin support, there was this violinist who asked for Rs. 75. After some thinking, Chembai agreed to pay Rs. 75. In the concert the violinist could not keep up with Chembai's singing. Things reached a point when he had to stop playing. Chembai, with a twinkle in his eyes, said "What happened. You wanted Rs. 75, is it not?"

My father learned many things from Chembai. One important attribute he learned was straightforwardness. It was not for Chembai to talk in a round-about manner. He was bold and direct in everything he did. It was the same with Mani Iyer. My father was always direct and to the point.

Once, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Mani Iyer and I went to Bombay. The occasion was that Mani Iyer was to be felicitated and awarded at the Bharatiya Sabha. Chembai had been camping in Bombay for some time and he was invited to attend the function. In his speech Mani Iyer spoke at length and acknowledging the contributions of his well-wishers, said "Sri Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar and Sri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar are like my two eyes."

No one said anything against Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar since both fellow musicians and the public held him in reverence. But there are two incidents which can be called the only low-points in his life. In those days, in Palakkad, an annual Thyagaraja Aradhana was being held. Once, Chembai went to listen to an artiste and unintentionally sat down in a place reserved for ladies. Someone, on seeing this



Palghat Mani Iyer being felicitated with a silver mridangam by Chembai at Bharatiya Music and Arts Society, Bombay (early 70s). Also seen sitting in the photo is TN Krishnan and standing behind is CV Narasimhan (Mridangist and an associate with the Sabha)

spoke some derisive and unbecoming words to Chembai. His remarks were particularly unwarranted and harsh, considering a person of Chembai's age and character. Chembai got up, and without saying a word in reply, left the place. He never since attended any concerts at the Palakkad Thyagaraja Aradhana. In another case it was a concert in which Mani Iyer was playing for Chembai. After Mani Iyer played a brilliant thani, Chembai remarked in Tamil "Oru payalum idhu varaikum ippadi vasichadillai" (No one has played like this before). One observer was indignant that Chembai should not have used the word 'payal'. He criticised Chembai's remark in the newspaper saying that he had meant to call all earlier mridangists by using the offensive word and also resorted to dharna and hunger-fast before Chembai's house demanding an apology. Chembai was put off by the way these things shaped up. He remarked that he did not mean all that he said, that he had only wanted to convey that Mani Iyer had played well, and that he had no disrespect for earlier mridangists.

Years back, Chembai was giving a concert with Mani Iyer at Srinivasa Sastry Hall, Mylapore. He was being given vocal support by his disciple who was a youngster. In the kriti 'Raghuvamsa sudha', he was singing a sangathi which needed little effort to sing. When it was to be repeated, he kept quiet allowing his disciple to sing. The disciple with the idea that his master will sing the difficult sangati was just singing the outline, without taking pains to sing it. But by Chembai, keeping quiet, this was exposed to the public. Sri Chembai looked at the disciple and asked "What is it you are doing?" The audience burst into laughter. The incident only shows the sense of humour in him.

There is really no end to the anecdotes on Chembai. I hope my recollections are useful for the readers in getting a better idea of Chembai and the special relationship which my father and I enjoyed with him.



Nirmala Seetharaman endorses Carnatic Music

“Dāsarendare purandara dāsarayya”. Purandara Dasa predates the Trimurti-s of Carnatic music. Distilled essence of bhakti in simple Kannada. He introduced Raga Mayamalavagowla & it is taught as the first scale for every Carnatic music student, even today...



Tweets Nirmala Seetaraman, Minister for Defence on Sangita Pitamaha Purandaradasa on his punyatiti (a day on which he reached the heavenly abode).

She follows up this with series of Tweets on the Saint Thyagarajaswamy Aradana...

Now live on @DDNational #Aradhana #Tyagaraja in sweet #Telugu, sung by all. Tyagaraja's bhakti was the longing of an earthly being to unite with his Maker who he saw in Sri Rama. Tyagaraja cared nothing about living in poor financial condition- just kept pouring out his heart



Tiruvaiyaru Aradhana, an annual musical dedication to Saint #Tyagaraja one of the 3 great composers of classical Carnatic music, at his samadhi. #PushyaBahulaPanchami. Traditionally held with participation of/by/ for all without discrimination #musicaltreat



Thanks @DDNational for live telecast of this musical tradition. Such a treat to watch so many young aspiring musicians, as with every year, joining in the #Aradhana. Music lovers look forward to re-energise themselves by linking here. #Tyagaraja



Her happiness was short-lived as the DDNational cut short the ending portion of the Kriti and plays an advertisement truncating it. Annoyed she Tweets...

Yo @DDNational what! You couldn't wait for a few moments more for the Pancharatna Krithi-s to be completed. Advertisement and more. #Aradhana #Tyagaraja. Thoughtless, insensitive.



When she visited UP recently, she has made an appeal to the state government to restore the house of Muthuswamy Dikshitar who lived there when he was at Varanasi.

Thank you Hon.Minister Prof. Rita Bahuguna Joshi, a graceful host. #UPInvestorsSummit. Thanks also for accepting my request to identify & restore in Kashi/Varanasi the house in which Shri Muthuswami Dikshitar, one of the Trimurti of Carnatic music, lived.

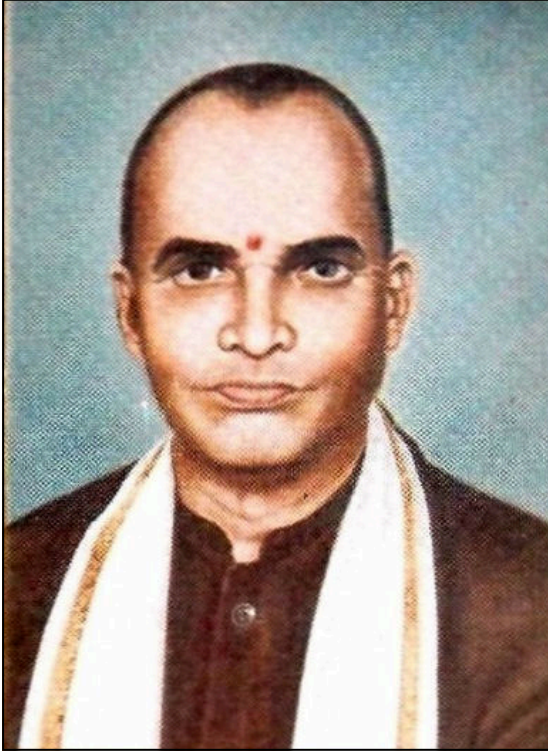
#முத்துசுவாமி தீக்ஷிதர்



It is a great feeling for all of us that we have one of our biggest patron in our Central Cabinet Minister. Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira, Bengaluru offers its humble praams and respects to our Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharamanji. Your inclination, intensions and actions towards our great art form will be highly appreciated by the music fraternity.

D Subbaramaiah: Doyen of the last century

TS Vasanthamadhavi



The year 1960 is very memorable for me- it was the year my musical journey reached an important milestone. We had just started the lessons required for the Vidwat grade and while making enquiries about a learned teacher with whom we could continue our lessons, there was only one name that came up – Sri Subbaramaiah. With our mother, my sister Vasundhara and myself went to Karnataka College of Music in Shankarapuram, Sri Subbaramaiah's Music School. He asked us to sing something so that he could gauge our standards. We sang Sri GNB's composition in Raga Kaanada "Paramukhamelanamma". After listening to us, he said

that we could start our lessons with him from the following day. There are no words to describe the joy that we felt! This was the beginning of our guru- shishya relationship. We used to address him as "Meshtru" or "Meshtre".

Our guru instructed us to attend the concerts of all musicians. We would have to describe the previous evening's concert, which we had attended, in our class on the following day. Not only would he then patiently provide information about concepts that we had not understood, but also he would stimulate our thinking by challenging us with interesting problems. For instance, if a krithi's sahitya had 10 sangathis, he would only teach 4 or 5 of those, and would ask us to come up with the remaining sangathis on our own. This helped us understand practically how sangathis had to be combined to bring out the raga bhava. We also clearly understood the difference between rendering sangathis and doing neraval. In this manner, our guru would only act as a guide while we, the students, put in a lot of efforts towards our musical learning. If we had heard a krithi that we did not know and expressed an interest to learn it, our guru never refused. There was never a doubt in our minds that our guru would teach us anything that we wanted to learn. He was such a generous teacher!

Despite the many number of lessons he taught, our guru was still an endless treasure-house of music. He greatly favoured the compositions of Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitar and our lessons were mainly Sri Dikshitar's compositions. Another special aspect that I would like to share is the fact that he never wrote out the lessons for anybody. Even today, I do not know what his handwriting looked like! He would sit on a chair

and teach while we would sit down on a jammakhana (cloth mat) and learn. He would comfortably sing both swara and sahitya. Can you guess his Shruthi? He used to sing in 4 or 4 ½ pitch sruthi! As he sang, we would quickly write down the sahitya, note down the swaras as needed, and as soon as we went home, we would notate the swara and sahitya for the entire composition. This is how we used to learn all our music lessons. While it is true that we used to find it difficult then, it is those efforts that ultimately bore fruit in our music. Our Guru's father was alive when we were attending the classes. Some times he also would give tips to us which were really very useful.

Apart from Saturday and Sunday, we used to have our music classes 5 days a week! Today's lesson had to be learned by the following day; only then would our lesson continue. We used to finish learning a krithi in 3 days- pallavi on the first day, anu pallavi on the second and charana on the third day. On the fourth day, we had to present the entire krithi. The following day, we would start learning yet another krithi. This was the manner in which our learning progressed. Our guru loved to teach and was always ready to teach any number of lessons to a capable student. Along with this, he would draw from his own experiences to teach us topics related to music. He initially lived in Mysore and then later moved to Bangalore. So he would talk about the musical talents and achievements of musicians like Mysore Vasudevacharya, Veene Sheshanna, Veene Subbanna, Bhairavi Kempe Gowda and others. These ideals motivated us students to also create and achieve our own goals. We are really fortunate that we had such a wonderful teacher!

Our guru had a good sense of humour. As I have previously mentioned, he used to sing in 4 or 4 ½ pitch sruthi. When he was a young man, perhaps around 20 years old, senior artists like Veene Sheshanna and Sri Vasudevacharya would encourage (coax) him to eat 15-20 idlis, drink a big jug full of coffee and then would ask him to sing and our guru would happily sing for 4-5 hours! This was the time before microphones were in use, and so he had to sing loud enough

to be heard from one end of the hall to the other. For his concerts, Vidwan Mysore T Chowdiah would usually provide violin accompaniment. Additionally, he sang several concerts with harmonium accompaniment by Vidwan Arunachalappa. He used to unfailingly attend the Music Academy concerts in Madras (now Chennai) each year. At that time, the Academy conferences used to last a whole month and one of our guru's senior disciples used to teach in Bangalore during his absence.

During those days, the main focus of musicians was to perform and to teach students. There wasn't a great emphasis placed on the theory concepts in music. However, our guru had profound knowledge in the theory aspects as well, and had tremendous authoritative knowledge about all topics related to music. He was knowledgeable about German music and had a very good command over the English language. He published several articles in major periodicals and played an important role anywhere there were conferences or discussions related to music. He used to render rare and difficult ragas with ease. He was extremely well versed in Sanskrit too and used to conduct free Sanskrit classes at the Sanskrit College near Bangalore Fort. He maintained very good friendships with other musicians- Vidwan Pallavi Chandrapa, Vidwan Zakaria, Vidwan L Raja Rao and others were his very close friends. Many senior musicians used to visit our guru to get information from him for their lecture-demonstration programs. Our guru used to generously share his knowledge with them. It was truly a privilege for us to witness these unique exchanges frequently and we were very fortunate to observe a number of Vidwans up close.

Our teacher was popularly known as Devaranama Subbaramaiah. He had tuned raga and tala for a number of daasa keertanas, the most famous perhaps being *Jagadoddharana Adisidaleshode*. By composing music to several devaranamas, he popularised a number of these compositions. The HMV recording house also played a role in these efforts. Previously, musicians like Veene Sheshanna and Mysore Vasudevacharya had brought out a few recordings;



D Subbaramaiah receiving the State award (1963) from the Governor of Karnataka. S Nijalingappa, CM of Karnataka looks on.

however their efforts were not very successful as the recording techniques were not very good. By the time our teacher's recordings were released, technology had greatly improved and this led to his recordings being extremely popular and widely appreciated; in fact it is said that the devaranama "*Manujashariravidenu sukha*" was on everyone's lips in the 1930s!

The Karnataka College of Music was the first institution of its kind to be recognised by the government. This college, established by our guru in 1931, was the first institution where students could receive formal music education from a teacher. Subsequently, Vidwan Chowdiah established the Ayyanar College of Music in Mysore and later opened a branch in Bangalore also, Vidwan Venkateshaiah established Vani Sangeetha Vidyalaya, Vidushi Chennamma founded Gana Mandiram and Vidwan Narayanaswamy Bhagavathar founded the Vijaya College of Music. In this way, a number of institutions were established all over Karnataka thanks to the pioneering efforts of our guru. What an achievement!

Our guru was never one to teach for monetary gains. Since the college was a government accredited institution, the fees were Rs. 5 for junior level, Rs. 7 for senior level and Rs. 10 for Vidwat level students. There were a couple of students who were unable to afford the fees and our guru never charged them. We never knew who those students were, as our guru never differentiated between those who paid fees and those who could not during his teaching. He used to arrange programs for Sri Thyagaraja Aradhana each year for which he invited well known musicians to perform. The music students were then given the opportunity to perform in the presence of these scholars.

When the Karnataka Ganakala Parishat was started, our guru was elected as the first president of the experts committee. Sangeetha Kalaratna Sri BVK Shastri in his book "*Muralivani*" has written about our guru's accomplishments as president, his fluent speeches as well as the souvenir that was brought out under his direction. This was truly a homage paid by Sri Shastri to our guru's scholarly approach to Musical subjects and his great personality. Ganakalasindhu was the title he obtained, pre-


siding over the third music conference held in Mysore. Ganakalakushala was another important title he was bestowed upon. He was blessed by heads of various Matts.

Our guru used to conduct his classes in a rented house in Shankarpuram. As his health deteriorated, he had to stop teaching. While he lived with his youngest son Sri Satish Kumar, all his children were very caring and looked after him lovingly. Initially he suffered from night-blindness; later he lost his eyesight completely. This was a very unfortunate situation, especially for a person who loved to read. He ended up appointing a Sanskrit vidwan who would sit with him at home and would read portions of all the texts that he needed. I used to visit him frequently at Sri Satish's house. He used to recognise me by the sound of my voice and would excitedly welcome me. He would clarify all my doubts with satisfactory answers and was truly responsible for increasing the depth of my knowledge. His life 1903-1986 (August 16th 1986) saw many ups and downs; nevertheless he made immense contributions to the field of music and one can still find his disciples spread all over the world.


Our guru used to frequently tell me that I should establish a music college. For whatever reason, I did not give this idea much thought. After his death in 1986, I made up my mind to start a music college and October 1986 saw the birth of Ragashree College of Music. Besides imparting music lessons, there were many programs conducted on the second Saturday of every month that dealt with the theoretical aspects of music, model concerts by very senior artists, as well as the Composers Day that took place on the last Sunday of the year. Great

scholarly musicians like RK Srikanthan, Anoor Ramakrishna, A Veerabhadraiah, Prof. HV Krishnamurthy, AV Anand, RA Ramamani, Prof. TR Subrahmanyam, Dr. BM Sundaram, TAS Mani, TS Vasundhara, S Shankar, RK Padmanabha, Jambu Kannan, Bangalore K Venkataram, Saraswati Ramachandran, Seethalakshmi Venkatesan, Vallabham Kalyanasundaram, Padma Gurudat, MS Govindswamy and many others have performed on these occasions. As part of the Composers Day program, we would also honour one musician. On March 10, 1993, Sri D Subbaramaiah Fine Arts Trust was founded with the aim of expanding these programs. The main aim of this trust is to provide scholarships for qualified students of Carnatic music, hold monthly programs that are useful to the students, and conduct the Ragashree Sammelanotsav in the last week of November each year. During this occasion, senior musicians/dancers are honored with the Gandharva Vidyanidhi title, a promoter of fine arts is honoured with the Lalithakalashraya title, and senior practitioners of other art forms are felicitated with due respects. Since the past eight years, the monthly programs have been consolidated into smaller 3-day festivals that take place during the last weekends of February, May and August. Last year the organisation celebrated the silver jubilee on a grand scale from November 24- 28th. A number of prominent artists participated in the festival. On this occasion, a documentary was shown describing the organisation's achievements. This organisation is my Guru Dakshina - dedicated to the memory of a Guru, who was one of the greatest scholarly musicians of the last century.

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Kalavanta 2018

Rajashree Yogananda

Karnataka Fine Arts Council presented National Level Karnatic Music Youth Festival - 2018 in a very grand manner in the newly built up Auditorium of Suchitra Cinema and Cultural Academy, BSK II Stage, Bangalore - 560 070. The Kalavanta festival started with a vocal concert of Shruti Shankar Kumar followed by Harish Pandav - Saxophone on 23rd January. On 24th January Abhishek Ravishankar presented a vocal recital and the 2nd concert was from Swetha Balasubramanian. On 25th January Rakshita Ramesh presented Veena recital followed by V. Subasri's vocal recital. On 26th January S. Mahadevan gave Veena recital followed by Varun Ganesan's vocal. On 27th January Sanjay Nag gave a vocal recital followed by Mandolin concert by Aravind Bhargav. Each and every performance by the participants for the Kalavanta on all the 5 days was very much appreciated by everyone present. The participants were from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and USA. The accompaniments for the concerts were very good and there was good team work. The auditorium is well equipped and very much

suited for Kalavanta festival. The concluding day 28th January, saw S Saketaraman give a superb vocal concert with HM Smitha on Violin and Tumkur B Ravishankar on Mridangam. The festival concluded with Kalavanta award function and the Chief Guests N Raghu, Assistant Director of Programmes AIR, KVR Tagore, Chairperson of Suchitra cinema and cultural academy and Dr. Sadananda Maiya, Founder & MD, Maiyas Beverages and Foods Pvt.Ltd who attended the programme very much appreciated the way in which the Kalavanta youth festival was conducted. The Kalavanta awardees of 2018 were **Varun Ganesan** of USA for vocal, **Anirudha Bharadwaj** for violin accompaniment and **L Sudarsan Srinivas** for Mridangam accompaniment. Senior Vidwan Neyveli Santanagopalan, Vidwan D Balakrishna and Vidwan Bangalore V Praveen were the judges and they were very appreciative of the way Kalavanta festival was conducted and quality of the participants.

Sankranti and Spring Music Festival 2018

Rajashree Yogananda

The music season in Bengaluru starts soon after the December music season in Chennai. Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira gave a wonderful start to the music season by having their 29th Sankranti Music Festival from 31st of December 2017 onwards, starting with the delightful concert of Trichur brothers, SriKrishna Mohan

and Ramkumar Mohan. The first day of the new year 2018 had Smt.Vani Satish giving a very fine vocal concert. 2nd of January had energetic singing by young Sampagodu Vignaraja and on the 3rd it was the senior artiste Malladi Suri Babu who rendered a soulful concert much to the delight of the audience. Neyveli San-



tanagopalan on 4th January presented a very scholarly music recital. On 5th January S. Sake-taraman gave memorable vocal concert and Dr. S Sowmya's concert on 6th January was dedicated to Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. S Ramanathan and Dr. S. Sowmya presented a very good musical tribute to Dr. S Ramanathan. Mysore A Chandan Kumar gave a melodious flute recital on 7th January. 8th January, the last and concluding day of the festival had Lalgudi GJR Krishnan and Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi presenting a delightful violin duet recital. Sankranthi Music Festival gave a very good start to the new year and the Open Air Theatre of Sri Rama Lalitha Kala Mandira with very good sound system and its ambience made it all the more alluring.

After the Sankranti Music Festival in January, SRLKM holds its much awaited annual Spring Music Festival in the month of February. The festival commenced on 4th February 2018 with HN Bhaskar and HM Smitha giving a very fine violin duet concert. Amrita Murali on 5th February gave a scholarly recital and Sangita Kalanidhi Sanjay Subrahmanyam's concert was outstanding as usual on 6th February. Kalavathi Avadhooth gave delightful concert on 7th February and Malladi brothers on 8th February gave a very good vocal duet concert with rare accompaniment of Sangita Kalanidhi Trichy

Shankaran on Mridangam. SR Vinay Sharva from Bengaluru presented a very energetic and delightful vocal concert on 9th February. Smt. Ranjani and Smt. Gayathri on 10th February presented a very memorable concert to overflowing audience. On 11th February the versatile duo were presented with the award "Sangeetha Vedantha Dhurina" by Sri Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar. The award carried a purse of Rs. 1,00,000/- each and Silver medal and the citation. The award function concluded with Ramakrishnan Murthy's vocal concert which was very enjoyable. On the last and concluding day, 12th February 2018, Dr. Shobha Shashikumar presented a very rare dance programme "Bharata Nritya" – a presentation based on a bunch of poems of classic poets like Kalidasa, Kumaravyasa, Dr. DV Gundappa, Akkamahadevi and the contemporary legend Shatavadhani Dr. R Ganesh. SRLKM feels blessed to have had Dr. R Ganesh as the chief guest for the dance programme and he explained beautifully and vividly the poems selected by Dr. Shobha Shashikar in his inimitable style. The festival, held at Bangalore Gayana Samaja had the rasikas soaking in the music fervour and appreciating all the concerts. The accompanying artistes lifted the concerts by several notches and gave the audience a holistic feeling.

Ambujam Krishna: Sensitivity and Spiritualism

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan (office bearer, The Music Academy)



As she got into the car, Ananthalakshmi Sadagopan, the longstanding friend of Ambujam Krishna saw the large, single hibiscus flower, gorgeous in orange and red. "How beautiful!" she exclaimed. Ambujam Krishna beamed at the compliment for her garden and replied softly, "Yes, it is beautiful. But its life is but a day." Ananthalakshmi had a jolt and little did she realise that the life span of her dear friend, philosopher and guide sitting beside her was going to end abruptly in less than forty- eight hours.

The transitory nature of our life on earth and the world around us was ever present in Ambujam Krishna's mind. Losing her mother at the tender age of two was perhaps the cause of such awareness. In the normal course of events it could have given rise to insecurity and cynicism. But her family background and upbringing made her turn naturally to spiritualism and poetry.

Brought upon a daily diet of the lilting poetry of the Alvars, Ambujam learnt to recite the lines with relish. Like the Alvars she was immersed in the passion and yearning of the Bhakthi literature. Happily married to her cousin TS Krishna, a business magnate of the T.V.S. family, she had her hands full as the mother of four children. Her degree in Home Science from the prestigious Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, equipped her to be an ideal house wife.

The turning point in her life came in 1953 when she visited the samadhi of Saint Tyagaraja, the composer at Tiruvaiyaru. Soon after the visit she "got" her first song "Unnai allaal" on goddess Meenakshi of Madurai. None was more surprised than herself. Soon songs started pouring out of her in quick succession. They were all in the kriti format perfected by Tyagaraja and like him she turned to Rama, who became her ishta devata, although she sang about other gods and goddesses such as Krishna, Vishnu, Siva, Parvati, Muruga, Vinayaka, Saraswathi, and so on.

Directly addressing her worries, queries and problems to Divinity she started realising that it was not a one - way communication. She could perceive a connection in events and happenings, which were in response to her entreaties. This was a constant revelation and source of joy to her, which in turn were expressed in more songs. While her songs on Rama were expressions of anguish and yearning, striking a personal note, the songs on Krishna were in the Madhura Bhakthi mode steeped in the bridal mysticism of Srirangam and the parental love of Vatsalyam.

In her song "Mohana Roopam Kanden" there occurred a line where Rama declared that He had accepted her under His protection. She was

taken aback when the line came to her and was disturbed as to the propriety of assuming Rama's acceptance. Imagine her joy when within a few days she was unexpectedly ordained to take the religious vow of Saranagathi under her Guru. This ritual of surrender assured the devotee of the Lord's acceptance and protection. The line now fell into place.

Another song welcoming Krishna heralded an unexpected gift of a Krishna icon in marble sent by a friend from Delhi on the same day. A prayer to the Lord to remember her was answered immediately by the prasadam sent from far off Badri in the Himalayas.

As she came to believe more and more in the Divine connection her sensitivity as a poet intensified. As she once sat watching a film, she was flooded with emotion by a casual question, "Krishna kahan hai?" (Where is Krishna?) by one of the characters. She got a song completed before the end of the film.

She was well versed in Tamil and other languages like Hindi and Sanskrit and had a working knowledge of Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. Yet she found it inexplicable when she got songs in languages other than her mother tongue and had to check with experts to find out whether the diction and grammar were right. She was surprised and happy when they were pronounced perfect.

She was always uneasy to call her songs her own as she was convinced that they were a Divine gift which she passed on to those interested. She explained that she could never bring herself to compose anything deliberately. Her manuscript contains several such unfinished songs of exquisite beauty waiting for the elusive lines to complete them. She never made the effort to complete them artificially. "If He wants to give me He will," she said.

She loved to visit the temples all over our country and most of these visits were marked by spontaneous outpourings in songs. Once when she was returning with some of her friends from the temple at Azhagar Koil near Madurai, the song "Nindra thirukkolam kaaneer"

took shape and was completed even before they reached home.

She had always considered Meenakshi, the Goddess of Madurai as her mother. But the Vaishnavite vows of Saranagathi did not permit her to visit Saivite temples. She continued to sing to Meenakshi all through her life even though she never visited the temple after she took the vow. To her there was but One God who appeared in several forms. And everything around her was His creation, beautiful and perfect in its own way.

She was no modern day Meera, mad with love of God and oblivious to her surroundings. Her spiritualism was a personal one and she never flaunted her faith. She led a normal life, aware of her responsibilities to her family and to the society. The Sathguru Sangeetha Vidyalayam and the modern auditorium Lakshmi Sundaram Hall owe their existence to her initiative and sustained efforts.

Even though she could have bought all the baubles that money can buy, she had no excessive interest in clothes, jewellery and the like. A photographer once chose to draw a necklace around her neck in the photo when he found that she would not wear one while posing with her baby daughter Radha for a photograph in his studio.

She loved books, music, films and other forms of art and could discuss with equal enthusiasm an exotic recipe or the finer points of Vaishnavite philosophy. Above all she loved people and took a genuine interest in their well being and happiness. There were many, who found solace and comfort in her company and would confide their problems to her. Her word of advice was always to repose their faith in God. It was this unswerving faith that was her source of joy and contentment. While the world looked upon her as being well connected she was indeed connected in a different sense to the greater scheme of God's creation.

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MDR: An Indian classical musician

Venkatasubramanian Viraraghavan

To restate a cliché, Sri. MD Ramanathan (MDR) was a musicians' musician. Perhaps one of the reasons for this reputation is his extempore innovation - a hallmark of his music. Like Ulysses who could never quench his thirst for travel, MDR couldn't quench his thirst for innovation; he would keep looking for the next idea and more importantly, would not hold on to old ones. Despite the amount of innovation he brought in, listeners would hardly allege that his music was not "classical" enough. Some would (correctly) observe that he used Hindustani-like phrases in his music, but still consider his music 'Carnatic'. It does appear that MDR had somehow - perhaps cleverly and masterfully or perhaps it just happened - integrated Hindustani styles into his music. The Hindustani leaning was sometimes easily noticeable, at other times, only subtly. This article gives a few examples of both types, and in the process, describes some other notable aspects of his music. However, neither is the description of MDR's music exhaustive, nor is it exclusive.

Let's start with a common example. Almost anyone who has heard MDR has probably heard his *Mahāgaṇapatim* (HMV studio recording, probably available on Spotify). And, they may remember this kalpanā-svara sequence just over five minutes into the official recording, Pa-Dhaa-Ni-Śa-Ṛi-Śaa-Ni-Paa-Ma-Ri-Ga Mahā... And, (almost) everyone who listens to this is struck by its uniqueness. It takes a few "hearings" to understand the subtlety, but on deeper analysis it becomes apparent: it sounds like a phrase from the rāga *Bahār* in Hindustani music! (In notation, (Pa) (Dhaa) (Ni) would be the (P) (N2 D2) ([Ś] N3). This is sufficiently unconventional that it may well raise eyebrows at first, but it shows sheer genius. It is well known that many svaras in Carnatic music are played around the intended notes rather than at them.

MDR had beautifully invoked this spirit of gamakas in Carnatic music in a very unconventional way to produce that special Bahār-like Dha.

It must be said that such analysis is easiest done in hindsight (a "uselessly analytical process" to quote MDR himself from another context). How he produced such music is tough to say. A fan will readily, and indeed a serious connoisseur of Carnatic music also may, ascribe it to MDR's musical sensitivity and vast internalised knowledge of the nuances of the art. And, of course, his naturally innovative mind. Having said that, as far as I have heard, among several of his renditions of Nāṭa, this is the only one with such a gamaka. It was very common for him to experiment in a concert and completely forget about it in the next. Indeed, it was a feature of his music. If one is still troubled by such a Dha in Nāṭa, they can take heart from the fact that he (I believe) never repeated it. (The interested reader may note that he touched D2 very often, like in a janta-anusvara, when singing the opening phrase of *Jagadānandakāraka* at the syllable dā, which is different from the example presented; which also happens to be very different from the way the song is generally sung!)

The fine balance that MDR struck between creativity and tradition is, in my view, the ideal one. Too much creativity can be an overdose. Put another way, it is important that the underlying established structure (i.e. context) is evident when showing incremental creative flashes. MDR did this to perfection. Perhaps that is why his music is called "classical" and "creative" at the same time. This type of creativity is to be distinguished from phrase-based manōdharma, which is combining known phrases of a rāga in different ways. The stock weapon in the armoury of a Carnatic musician, MDR too made sufficient use of it. What MDR additionally did is

one plane above (at least in my view): he invented gamakas (as in the Dha above or gave them a refreshingly fresh form) and phrases. Both these require that the listener is first given a context of an innovation.

That MDR made use of the listeners' contexts and alertness is evident in several examples. In the ciṭṭa svara sequences (of varṇams) that are themed on a particular svara (e.g. Ma in Nārāyaṇagaula: https://youtu.be/LC_Hu5NUd-ck?t=351, Dha in Kānaḍa, both in aṭa tāḷa), MDR would sometimes sing this complete ciṭṭa svara sequence once, and then repeat it, but this time singing only the theme-svara preceded by a couple of svaras prior to it. The listeners were expected to fill, in their minds, the missing svaras. Helpfully, they would have heard the complete sequence a few seconds earlier and some snatches would remain in memory. In these cases, the violinist, who filled in too, was perhaps most helpful to them. Invariably, the theme-svara fell at the sama of a beat and this enhanced the effect due to the synchrony with the mṛdaṅgam. Interestingly, there is at least one instance where MDR had left it to the listeners to fill in even a kalpanāsvara sequence: as part of *Gajavadana* (Hamsadhvani, Rupaka, Varadadasa at the Music Academy, 1969). He started the pattern at Sa (S;;RGPGRSN) and it had to be translated to R, G, P, N and Ś by the listeners (<https://youtu.be/dde5imt0li4?t=370>). Perhaps MDR took after authors of Maths text books who leave some proofs to their readers!

A classic example of inventing a context-base phrase is found in his tānam in a Śankarābharaṇa Rāga-Tāna-Pallavi (believed to be at the Music Academy in 1970). At one point (<https://youtu.be/pGxGZUISTxY?t=877>), he sings the phrase (to tāna syllables):

Ś N D P ; M G M P ; N ; N N ;

Surely, GMP;N;NN; is a very unusual phrase in Śankarābharaṇa, and it takes a certain type of genius to produce it innocuously. By itself, the phrase can fit Bēhāg too. How is it possible to use it in Śankarābharaṇa? Having established the context of Śankarābharaṇa earlier in the

ālāpāna and in the early part of the tāna, MDR tactfully and innovatively, or just instinctively, dropped in the above Bēhāg-like phrase, which was enjoyed by the listeners as Śankarābharaṇa. Again, as far as I have heard, MDR did not repeat this phrase in any other rendition. Here, it must be added that it could be detrimental to add this (or similar innovations like the Dha in Nāṭa) as an 'identity phrase' for the rāga, but it is brilliant as a one-off innovation. For, it could be hasty to legitimise context-dependent creative phrases: both the context and the flow that enabled the innovation may be difficult to reproduce. And without them, the innovation can "fall flat" if it does not become "plain wrong."

It is worth noting that MDR, in the Śankarābharaṇa piece, later sang kalpanāsvaras with very little gamakas, almost like in Western music. There are examples to strongly suggest that MDR used to consciously move into the mode of singing plain notes (i.e. without gamakas). In a rendition of the Kalyāṇī aṭa tāḷa varṇam, he shows this difference methodically in one of the ciṭṭa svara sequences (<https://youtu.be/7XNkR-drAH3I?t=678>). He has even composed a song in Mōhana (Parakalanayya, Tishra Adi/Rupaka) with very few svaras having gamakas, not to mention the profusion of svarakṣaras in the song. As can be expected, it makes for quite a different listening experience. Nevertheless, singing a long sequence of notes without gamakas can be considered unconventional and warrants a closer look.

In the Carnatic genre it must be an endeavour to maintain separation between rāgas. Rāgas close together sound similar. Through the evolution of rāgas, some have become major and others, not so. Consequently, in the rāga-music scheme that Carnatic music is, it would be good to keep the minor rāgas sufficiently far away from major ones.

MDR had an uncanny (or perhaps well-researched) understanding of this aspect, especially by using plain notes that served well for the listener to disambiguate certain rāgas from more "major" or "well-known" one. An example

will help. In MDR's rendition of the rāga Gau-rīmanōharī (<https://youtu.be/4TPCbfzlp18?t=547>), the increased use of the plain sad-hāraṇa gāndhāra (without gamaka, especially in svaras) and the emphasis on the kākali niṣāda take it sufficiently far away from the major rāga, Kharaharapriyā. The dīrgha kampita gamaka on the sadhāraṇa gāndhāra could, on the other hand, place it much closer to the latter: A very clever ploy indeed. Similarly, the plain notes in his Pantuvarālī take it comfortably far away from Pūrvikalyāṇī. Lo! Rāgas considered close have been moved further away – how typical of MDR! Funnily, this plain-notes example takes us back to how he invented gamakas.

As Hindustani musicians are accustomed to doing, MDR emphasises the prati madhyama and Śuddha ṛṣabha in Pantuvarālī. This type of Hindustani-like emphasis on plain notes is not uncommon in Carnatic music though. For example, in Abhērī or Karṇarājanī, the sād-hāraṇa gāndhāra without gamaka is used profusely. In Kannaḍagauḷa and Khamās, the kaiśikī niṣāda can be sung without gamaka. In Rēvatī, the Śuddha ṛṣabha can be sung without gamaka. But, MDR didn't stop there. He imbibed, or re-discovered by himself, the spirit of Hindustani music: In Pantuvarālī, he not only sang the Śuddha ṛṣabha as a plain note, but also made it the anchor for a gamaka between it and the antara gāndhāra. Now, that is extremely unusual in Carnatic music. He translated this gamaka to between Śuddha dhaivata and kākali niṣāda in Kīravāṇī. He (nearly) translated it to sād-hāraṇa gāndhāra and prati madhyama in Ṣaṇmukhapriyā. These may be cases of translating gamakas, if not inventing them; but they are definitely not just connecting phrases. As evidenced by his comments in the ālāpāna preceding *Aparāma bhakti* (Pantuvarālī, Adi, Thyagaraja) in a concert at Mumbai (<https://youtu.be/bnSCCEu-Aeto?t=205>), he seemed to have deliberately made the choice of using these techniques. His music practically shows how dwelling on plain notes are also a part of Carnatic music as much as they are of the Hindustani genre. (In the same rendition, as in many others, he swung

back and forth between the Carnatic and Hindustani styles.)

The preceding examples lead nicely to a general observation of MDR's music awareness - it is not for nothing that he was credited with bringing out the rāga in every svara. Apart from a deep understanding of technical aspects of rāga scales - such as grahāmśanyāsa svaras – he had a deep understanding of the possible gamakas in a rāga. An understanding deep enough to know which new gamakas can be added (as in Nāṭa and Pantuvarālī); an understanding deep enough to know where gamakas can be removed (as in Gaurīmanōharī and Pantuvarālī); an understanding deep enough that he could add potential signature phrases to rāgas (as in Śankarābharaṇa, if done carefully); an understanding so deep that its depth is difficult to fathom.

At this stage, a few other aspects of MDR's music should be mentioned lest the reader imagine that MDR's strength lay only in understanding rāga-music. That he was adept in other aspects of Carnatic music is not surprising, but these dimensions too found favour in his manōdharmā. In a Kīravāṇī niraval (<https://youtu.be/gTsJWsJBtVsg?t=2314>), he started the sequence 2 (or 4) sub-beats before the start of the tāḷa cycle and this fitted neatly with the meaning of the line chosen for the niraval: “[īru] padamula bhakti jēsina rīti tyāgarājūnikki ippuḍu (Kaligiyuntēgaḍā)”. Not one to indulge in too much arithmetic (kaṇakku), he did use it when the effect was actually needed – in kalpita sangīta. In this light, I feel that, for MDR, manōdharmā meant strictly extempore music. Perhaps this is why, in all the 60+ concerts I've heard of his, there is not even one instance of a practiced kōrvai forming the end of the kalpanāsvara sequence. One occasion, for the song *Bṛndāvana lōla* (Todi, Thyagaraja, Rupaka) comes close, but he dropped the idea after starting the pattern. In kalpita svaras, on the other hand, he has woven rhythmic patterns; these can be seen in some of his compositions: *Thyagarajagurum* (Kedara, Rupaka), *Padayugamu* (Janaranjani, Adix2), and his tillānas. For example, in his Kāpi tillāna, a pattern of 3+2+5 is repeated thrice

(counting 6 sub-beats per beat in *tiśra Ādi tāḷa*). The same *tillāna* has an increasing pattern in the *anupallavi* – 2+6, 4+6 and 8+6 starting 16 sub-beats from *sama*.

Not even the *sāhitya* of the music escaped his *manōdharma* “net”. There are some direct examples that can be listed: He inserts the terms *akhila*, *nikhila*, *sakala* quite often; in one concert, while singing the line *Praṇavasvarūpa* of *Vātāpi gaṇapatim* (Hamsadhvani, *Adi*, *Dikshitar*), he enunciates “Om” at the end of the previous line; he uses various prefixes in the *niraval* for “*Raghu/Kalyāṇa/Sitā rāmuni pada mula*” in *Kaligiyaṇṭēgaḍā* (*Kiravani*, *Adi x2*, *Thyagaraja*); he converts the song *Ninne bhajana* (*Nata*, *Adi*, *Thyagaraja*) to an *atīta-graha* song by starting at *Rāma*. These apart, a *nindāstuti* example might be more apt to convey his originality. In a concert (<https://youtu.be/bAm3tcgLI2c?t=754>), while singing *Ninne bhajana* he (I reckon) forgot the lines in the *caraṇam*. Being a composer himself, adept in at least Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, he had little difficulty in filling in alternative words that made sense:

snānādi japa tapa yōga dhyāna samādhi sukha prada

became (underlined words were modified)

snānādi japa tapa bhajanādi nīvē yani nammiti.

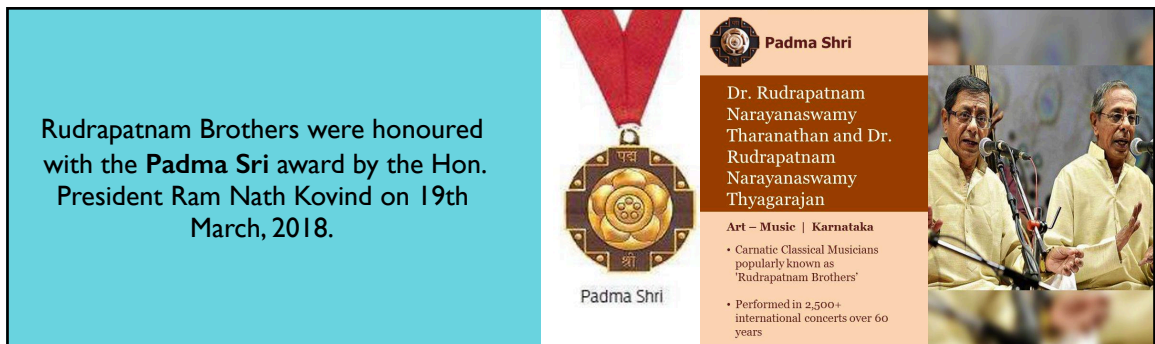
The next time he sang the same line – here’s the clincher – he inserted the word “*nera*” to get ... *nīvē yani nera nammiti*. Now, in a good way, that is too much, isn’t it? He forgot the lyrics in the first place, yet decided to innovate based on the made-up lyrics. If *manōdharma*

was not MDR’s second nature ... Correction: If *manōdharma* was not MDR’s first nature, I don’t know what was.

This *manōdharma* is likely to have led him to unexplored nooks of music, and a few of these nooks have a sufficient Hindustani feel. Whether he chanced upon them or looked out for them, I believe MDR was ahead of his time as a truly Indian musician. However that may be, and despite the focus of this article, it must be emphasised that the technical aspects of his music were only a means to enhancing its emotional appeal. Be it through *manōdharma* in *rāga*, *tāḷa* or *sāhitya*, meaningful pauses and repetitions, or modulation, all that may matter is that his music - carried by his rich, bass voice - goes straight to the listener’s heart.

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(Venkatasubramanian Viraraghavan works at TCS Research and Innovation, Tata Consultancy Services and is pursuing a Ph.D. at IIT, Madras. An avid Carnatic enthusiast and MDR fan, he takes the liberty to consider M D Ramanathan as his *Manasika Guru*. He currently learns *mridangam* from Sri. Jagadeesh Janardhanan. He designed a *raga* based on the Fibonacci sequence, named it *Natyavali*, and composed a *kṛiti* in it with a dual interpretation, one for *Saraswati* and another for *Science*. It was presented at the 18th conference of the International Society for Music Information Retrieval at Suzhou, China in October 2017, where he also presented a poster on a statistical analysis of *gamakas* in Carnatic music).



An evening of effervescent creativity

Anagha Yoganand

The evening of the 3rd of March, 2018 was indeed a memorable one for those who were present at the Chowdaiah Memorial Hall to witness the extravagance of Indian classical music brought to us by Bhoomija. As the evening sky dissolved into the enveloping darkness of the night, the two genres of Carnatic and Hindustani music blended together in synchronised unison. Ranjani and Gayatri in collaboration with Kaushiki Chakraborty presented a Jugalbandi that was power packed and full of alacrity. This concert was the brainchild of Gayathri Krishna of Bhoomija as she sought to bring in the most celebrated artists of both the streams of Indian classical music on to one stage; the result being a pure bliss to all the rasikas. The

artists were ably accompanied by Vittala Rangan on the Violin, Sai Giridhar on the Mridanga, Tanmay Deochake on the harmonium and Sandeep Ghosh on the Tabla.

The concert began with each of them presenting a piece in each of their respective forms. First, the strains of raag behag filled the air as Kaushiki Chakraborty sang a mellifluous alap accompanied by a composition in madhya lay Jhaptal 'chinta na karare' and a fast paced bandish 'dhoom dhaam kar aayi'. To compliment that, the Ranjani Gayatri sisters embarked upon their journey by delving deep into the subtle intricacies of the raga Poorvikalyani and after alapana in the raga, proceeded to sing one of Saint Ty-

Ranjani, Gayatri and Kaushiki Chakraborty performing for Bhoomija (Photo Courtesy, Dhanraj)



garaja's compositions '*Jnanamosagarada*' much to the delight of the rasikas present. The neraval and kalpana swarams were sung for the line '*Paramatmudu Jeevatmudu*' and the improvisation was crafted skilfully by the artists with the proficient accompaniment on the mridanga by Vidwan Sai Giridhar.

The much awaited part of the concert where all the three artists on stage came together perfectly in unison took form as the artists paired the ragas Bageshree and Sri Ranjani and elaborately explored the ragas. Where Kaushiki opted for a composition in teental '*Aao sajabo mandir*', the sisters rendered '*Bhuvini Dasudane*' and each raga was alternatively explored together in a deluge of taans and swaras, elevating the audience to a whole new level and creating an electrifying atmosphere.

The piece which succeeded was a Ragam Tanam Pallavi in the raga Charukeshi. After detailed and ornamented raga alapana by all the three artists, a flurry of riveting tanams left the audience bewitched. Special mention should be made of Vittala Rangan on the violin for his ingenuity. The pallavi was sung keeping the spirit of Holi. A line from Jayadeva's ashtapadi on Rasa Leela in chatushra jathi tripura tala '*Priye chaarusheele*' was chosen as the pallavi by Ranjani and Gayatri. To go with this, Kaushiki chose a line echoing similar sentiments '*Radha Govindam Bhaje man re*' in madhyalay teental. After a detailed neraval and kalpana swaras involving grahabhedam and

ragamalika, the tani avarthanam followed. Due credits need to be given to Sai Giridhar and Sandeep Ghosh who led the audience into a rhythmic trance with their alluring layam patterns.

A thumri, '*Rang Darungi nand ke lalan pe*' was what followed next. It lended a festive and a sprightly feeling as the song was based on the theme of Holi. Tanmay Deochake's lilting phrases on the harmonium during the alap engaged the rasikas and arrested their attention. An explosive end was given to this sublime musical treat with the rendition of the Madhuvanti tillana by Lalgudi Jayaraman where the raga was beautifully handled captivating the audience and the rasikas in complete awe.

This confluence of melodic harmony was a feast to all those present and as the concert came to a close, the rasikas left the hall humming the tunes that were lingering in their minds, no doubt, desiring to relive those three hours a couple more times.

<p>Dr. R Sathyanarayana was honoured with the Padma Sri award by the Hon. President Ram Nath Kovind on 19th March, 2018.</p>	 <p>Padma Sri</p>	<p> Padma Sri</p> <p>Dr. R Sathyanarayana</p> <p>Art Music Karnataka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carnatic music composer of the Sri Thyagaraja lineage • Scholar, Public Speaker, Teacher and Researcher on Indian Art and Culture 	
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