
Strings of Carnatic Music

Instrumentalists Part - 1



THE HINDU GROUP PRESENTATION
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THE HINDU

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A HINDU GROUP PRESENTATION

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Introduction

THE sound created by the vibrations of a string has long enthralled humanity. Over time, man has managed to use string instruments to produce sounds that simulate the sounds of human speech. Thus was born an era of music, in which those who could not modulate their vocal chords to produce a series of sounds in the desired frequencies, could do so playing string instruments.

South Indian musicians have been in the vanguard of things, be it in adapting the Western violin to Indian classical systems, or using the very traditional veena. Of late, other Western instruments such as the mandolin and the guitar have also come to be used in carnatic music, and while the former's acceptability has been established, that of the latter is on the rise.

These string instruments have created their own legends, geniuses such as Lalgudi Jayaraman, Chowdaiah, T N Krishnan, S Balachandar and Emani Sankara Shastri. While they all played carnatic, each artiste had a unique style "bani" which distinguished them from the rest. The styles then became schools for lesser artistes to follow.

Again, the lives of these legends exemplify the inevitable triumphs and travails a musician has to go through. What kind of men and women were they? How were their lifestyles? What were their faith and inspiration? What propelled them down the bumpy road towards mastery? These are some of the questions that interest students of music and connoisseurs alike.

The Hindu newspaper has been chronicling the developments in the cultural history of the country for over a century. Interviews and articles on music have provided useful insights to the readers, into the depths of the art. Take for instance Veena Doreswamy Iyengar's method of producing gamakas ("My guru has told me that pulling the strings is only one aspect of ten ways of gamakas playing notes separating the fingers is also a way of achieving gamakas"), or what M S Gopalakrishnan has to say about the violinist ("first and foremost, a violinist must be a vocalist, only then can he feel the bhava of the song") the articles that appeared in The Hindu have imparted to the reader, discernment of a great didactic value.

The need for collecting these interviews and articles and producing them in the form of a book has been felt for quite some time now. For, there is no other way to make available to a reader the nuggets of articles that appeared in print, say, half a century ago. It was this idea that has now resulted in Strings of Music, Instrumentalists Part-1. In this collection, one would learn of what was said of Veena Dhanam in 1935 or of Chowdiah in 1967, or what MSG told an interviewer in 1995. ●

M. Ramesh

Striking the strings with his fingers

AMONG the top-ranking vainikas of the previous generation, Sangameswara Sastri (1874-1932) (also called Sangama Sastrulu) occupies an honoured place. Tumarada was his house name. He was a Velanadu Telugu Brahmin. His father was Somayajulu and his mother Gunnamma. He was born in Bitivada Agraharam in Sangam Valasa of the Palakonda Taluq of Bobbili.

He left his native place in his eighth year to study music under his brother-in-law (elder sister's husband, the renowned Nandigana Venkanna Garu (also called Venkayya Garu) of Bobbili. Venkanna Garu was a revered singer of the time.

Sangameswara Sastri spent the first four years in learning vocal music under Venkanna Garu and later learnt to play the veena under him. Venkanna Garu was his sole Guru. Sangameswara Sastri did not learn music from anyone else. Even during his tutelage discerning vidwans noticed in him the future prodigy. He practised incessantly. On the completion of his studies under Venkanna Garu, Paravastu Rangacharulu, the renowned scholar of the time, happened to hear Sangameswara Sastri play on the veena. He felt thrilled at his performance. He took him to Visakhapatnam, arranged for him concerts in the Gonevari Samasthanam and made him the recipient of many honours and costly presents. Subsequently, Sangameswara Sastri obtained the patronage of the Zamindar of Khasimkota. Along with his patron he used to come to Madras. Once, Sastri extended his stay in Madras for a year and during that period cultivated the acquaintance of the leading sangita

vidwans of the time. Sometime later he left Khasimkota and became the samasthana vidwan in Pithapuram. This proved a turning point in his career.

He enjoyed the patronage of the Maharaja of Pithapuram right till the end of his life. Not only did the Maharaja shower upon him honours and emoluments, but honoured suitably the sangita vidwans who visited his Samasthanam. While at Pithapuram, Sastrulu came into contact with Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was so fascinated by his veena play that he took him to Calcutta and then to Bolpur. He kept him there for some months and derived aesthetic and spiritual exaltation by listening to the divine music of his veena. Tagore later deputed two of his musicians to go to Pittapurram and learn veena under Sangameswara Sastri. Sangameswara Sastri carried on his daily practice in the night from 11 p.m. till about 2 a.m., or 3 a.m. Each night he took up a raga for exposition and continued it right through the three or four hours of practice. Sastri performed the Veyi sadhakam, i.e. playing a thousand times at a stretch the

scale in three octaves, in the quickest tempo possible. If, in the course of this practice, a break or pause ensued, the practice was done afresh a thousand times, ignoring the number of times already practised. Sastrulu insisted on his disciples performing the veyi sadhakam, though tiresome and boring it was at the commencement.

Sangameswara Sastri sometimes produced effects on his veena which resembled megha gharjana (thunder) and at other times effects which resembled the sweet strains of the Kokila (musical bird). Without using his right hand fin-

Without using his right hand fingers, he sometimes played the veena with his left hand fingers alone; i.e., utilised the left hand fingers for striking and playing music. Sometimes he played on all the strings simultaneously.

gers, he sometimes played the veena with his left hand fingers alone; i.e., utilised the left hand fingers for striking and playing music. Sometimes he played on all the strings simultaneously. He was a past master in the technique of Naga bandha svara sampradayam.

Sangameswara Sastri held the veena in the urdhva (vertical) posture and played. Two other prominent vainikas who held the veenas in this position and played were Vizianagaram Venkataramana Das and Karaikudy Subbarama Aiyar, the elder brother of Karaikudy Sambasiva Aiyar.

Sangameswara Sastri was a good teacher. There was a vitarana (planned method) in his teaching. But on account of the vigour, arduousness and exacting character of his lessons, many did not stick to him and come up to his level of eminence.

Sangameswara Sastri was also an expert violinist. He played on the drum and nagaswaram also. Whenever he noticed a new technique in the play of another vidwan, he straightway practiced it a number of times and became thorough with it. Nothing was impossible for him.

Sangameswara Sastri was a pious and devout man. He was a Lalita Devi Upasaka. On the day of his demise, he became conscious of his approaching end. He felt he was going to survive only for a few hours more. Lying on the bed, he had the veena placed on the chest parallel to his body and played cheerfully till his end. The soul left his body to the sweet strains of his music. ●

P. Sambamurthy
Apr. 20, 1952

Personality as a musician

THE purpose of this article is to invite the attention of all interested in music to a few aspects of Dhanammal's personality as a musician. Invariably a soloist, Dhanammal plays and sings all alone with not even a mridangam for accompaniment. Only a sort of drone is kept on by the marvellous dexterity of her frail little finger that rubs the Pakkasaranis. Barring this, she uses no aids for the two meetu fingers.

This accounts for the meagre volume of her veena which is already a very small one. Her raga elaboration is very systematic, following, as it does, an exalted tradition. The brief survey of familiar ragas such as Thodi and Kalyani are models of perfection. With meticulous care, she has scanned the raga system, and has a clear grasp of its essentials. Her raga alapana, though always very brief, exhausts the salient features, Yet, those who have heard her for years on end, far from feeling bored or satiated, marvel at the ineffable charm, variety and freshness of her style.

Dhanammal plays more than a thousand songs. The choice and variety of the pieces may be seen from the fact that composers who figure in her repertoire number over seventy. This must have determined her whole perspective, and helped to shape and refine the plan of her ragas, and made them the grand, concrete, living pictures that they are. If her rendering of Thyagaraja's songs is crisp, sweet and scintillating, her interpretation of the other two of the famous Trinity is gorgeous, superb and ornate. And she is justly famous for Kshetragna's padams.

Her laya 'gnanam' is the more wonderful in view of the slow time measure that she adopts as a rule. Shyama Sastri's Swarajati in Bhairavi she plays in Misra Chapu, Birana Brova in Kalyani in Thirsra Eka, and Ninuvina in Poorvakalyani in Misra Eka, while Thyagraja's Madyamavati piece Alagalella she plays with two even strokes in lieu of an avartham of Rupaka. Difficult as

these are, not once does she falter, or fumble of such mettle is she made.

It may not be known to many that the talented composer of the most popular 'Javalis', the late Sri Dharmapuri Subbarayar, was a close friend and admirer of Dhanammal. I understand that the charming lilt in 'Faraz' opening with 'Smarasundara' was composed in her honour. By far the most noteworthy feature of Dhanammal's Veena is 'Thanam'. It is here that her genius is seen in all its sublime grandeur. As in raga, so



also in 'Thanam', her Pakkasaranis keep on gently vibrating like a faint drone, and do not beat regularly as if to keep time. Syllable glides into syllable and numberless curves and jerks follow one another in a deliberate, well-ordered plan, with perfect resonance and freedom from jarring metallic clang. Her imagination, her supreme mastery over the instrument, her unerring 'Kalapramanam' or time

sense, and her refined taste and admirable sense of proportion shine to the greatest advantage in this most interesting part of Veena music. Often, this haunts one long after the performance is over.

True to the age and tradition in which she was born and brought up, Dhanammal possesses rare traits as a vocalist. Her voice is sweet, clear and powerful. So admirably does it merge with the Veena that even an attentive auditor often mistakes the instrument for the voice and vice versa. Lastly, her pronunciation -- her songs run in six languages -- is absolutely flawless. She has carefully studied the purport of her songs. This enables her to render them with so much feeling, and also accounts for the high level of her general culture. To her, music is no vehicle for sordid, sensuous enjoyment, but a medium of communication with the soul. ●

R. Ramanuja Iyengar
Sep.20, 1935



Venerable vainika of Mysore

THE royal atmosphere of the Mysore palace in which he was brought up in his formative years has contributed to Veena Doreswamy Iyengar's regal maturity in life and art as well. Very simple in dress but aristocratic in veena exposition, Doreswamy Iyengar recounted with enthusiasm his step-by-step development as a first class vainika. "Veena playing runs in our family. My father Venkatesa Iyengar was a vainika, a member of the Mysore Palace Vidwans orchestra. Later he learnt flute. So I had intimate association with the reputed asthana vidwans."

Your initiation in veena was at the hands of your father.

Yes, for a few years. He taught me the rudiments sarali, alankaram in three kalams, gitas and swarajatis. I used to practise these lessons at least two hours a day.

As a boy of six, I attended a performance by Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar accompanied by Chowdiah on the violin. That was the first cutcheri I listened to with my father. Being

blessed with a taste for Carnatic music, listening to Ariyakudi only intensified my desire to hear more and more of it. Many vidwans would sing before the Maharajah during Dussera and I heard them.

Were you a disciple of your father through out?

No, no. My father was a disciple of Venkatagiriappa of the Mysore court. One day he asked my father, whether I was interested in Carnatic music and veena? My father said that I was learning veena from him. Venkatagiriappa said, "A son learning from his father will not be adequately disciplined. You send him to me. I shall train him." Thus I became a disciple of Venkatagiriappa for about eight to ten years. Venkatagiriappa taught me nearly 20 rare and timehonoured varnams, some kirtanas and one or two Pancharatna kirtanas. He would teach and watch me as I played. If I committed any mistake, I had to repeat the portion at least 15 to 20 times, till I could play perfectly. Unless he was satisfied he would not proceed further. He

always said, “You must get siddhi in playing.” In this way he taught me chitta tanam which Veena Seshanna had specially composed for vainikas to understand the method of playing tanam.

Can you recall any memorable event during your tutelage under your guru?

The Mysore Maharaja was very particular that a second line of vainikas, vocalists and others was prepared. So, one day, he asked my guru whether he had given training to young persons to take on his mantle. Then, along with me, Ranganayaki Parthasarathy and Nallar Rajalakshmi were also learning veena. The Maharaja asked my guru to bring his disciples one day to the Palace so that he could hear them. I remember I played for half an hour. The Maharaja heard me and asked my guru, “Who is that boy?” pointing to me. “He is our orchestra veena vidwan Venkatesa Iyengar’s so”. The Maharaja told my guru, “Train this boy well. He is full of promise”. I was pleasantly surprised when the Maharaja gave me Rs.50. As word spread about this incident, many came forward to offer me chances. By about 16 or 17 years, I was a complete vainika, I presented many cutcheris. I want to mention here a significant comment Venkatagiriappa made. As I was getting more offers to perform, my guru called my father and said, ‘Do not expose him too much to the public. Let him practise more and more. He was only against overexposure’, I had to attend to my general education too. I am a graduate of the Mysore University. My father was very particular that I should get a degree, though my guru often advised my father not to push me too much towards a degree. Today, I feel my university degree has bought me great benefits, made me cultured, taught me to behave well with people and my professional fraternity and given me the capacity to analyse and come to the right conclusions. Education is a must, I feel.

Could you explain the characteristics of the Mysore bhani of veena play?

Veena Seshanna and my guru have told me that pulling the strings is only one aspect of ten ways of gamakas mentioned in the Sastras. Confining the veena to the vocal regimen limits the scope of the instrument. Playing notes separating the fingers is also one way of achieving gamaka and this enhances total excellence of the veena.

You don’t use the contact mike.

My firm opinion is that there is an exaggeration of the veena sound although it reaches many. I feel the natural tone of the veena is lost when the contact mike is used. ●

SVK
Dec. 9, 1994

A boy prodigy

VEENA vidwan, S. Balachander (1927-1990) was born in a family of musicians in Madras. Balachander from the age of five showed interest in classical music. Starting with the “kanjira”, he accompanied his elder brother, Mr. S. Rajam, a vocalist, in concerts.

He then learnt to play other instruments -- tabla, harmonium, bulbul tara, mridangam, tharshenai, dilruba, tabla-tarang, and sitar. He was a full-fledged concert artiste in sitar for some time.

From his age of 15 for nearly three years Balachander served as an artiste in AIR Madras where he performed on all the above-mentioned instruments and almost daily, as a solo artiste, as part of an ensemble or an accompanist.

As soon he realised that Sitar did not provide him the scope to handle the breadth and depth of carnatic music and switched over to veena.

From that moment it was an endless relationship between veena and Balachander the two becoming synonymous with each other. Though Balachander did not have any master or tutor,

even to guide him through the initial-stages of veena playing, he has never for once felt it a handicap. In fact, he said, on the other hand - by the grace of God - gave him the unique opportunity to practise on his own, strive by himself, and bring credit for himself, for his achievement of having evolved a new trend, a new style and a new school of veena playing.

Balachander is also credited with the Great Achievement of having secured a unique place for veena as a “pucca” concert instrument (on with even concert vocalists) whereas prior to this, veena was treated mainly as an instrument for ‘chamber concerts’.

Balachander is also an authority on Hindustani Music and an eminent musicologist whose lecture-demonstrations in India and abroad are marked for clarity, lucidity and simplicity. His monumental work on the 72 melakarta ragas, which he presented in 12 LP records is one of the most significant contributions to musical posterity.

Balachander and controversies walked in hand



in hand. He criticised the Music Academy for denying instrumentalists a pre-eminent position in its concert schedule on par with the vocalists. Ever since he has not performed at the Music Academy barring during one season.

After he challenged Dr. Balamuralikrishna's claim that he had created a few new Ragas, Balachander proved with documentary evidence that the new ragas were actually existing ragas, which had been given new names. The technical committee of Music Academy endorsed Balachander's assertion.

But the last few years of Balachander's life was spent in his battle again "the swati tirunal myth" (to use his own words). Balachander claimed, again with ample documents that Swati Tirunal a king of Kerala did not compose the carnatic kritis attributed to him. Swati's successors had "fraudulently" affixed Swati's name in the songs composed by his court artistes, he charged.

Dr Balachander, who said he was fighting the swati battle for the sake of posterity, had also filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court demanding that the National Book Trust withdraw its official biography on Swati Tirunal written by Dr. Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, another leading carnatic musician.

Dr Balachander was also an excellent chess

player having, as a nine year old, defeated the then Sri Lankan national chess champion.

Dr Balachander has performed concerts, in USA, USSR, China, Japan, most of the European countries and almost all South East Asian countries.

Dr Balachander has four disciples -- Smt. Gayathri Ramachandran, Sri Veni Madhavan, Kumari Jayanthi Radhakrishna and Smt. Jayashree Mahesh.

The Secretary of the Music Academy, Mr. T.S. Parthasarathy writes. "I knew Balachander from his childhood. He began his music career as a boy prodigy who could play the tabla, sitar and other instruments even before he was seven. He later switched over to the veena and mastered it without the help of a teacher. He learnt many compositions on his own and could play ragam, tanam and pallavi effortlessly. He particularly developed Vivadi ragas to a degree of excellence and produced an album of records of the 72 Melakarta ragas. He was a talented conductor of orchestral music and also film music. The music world has lost a colourful if somewhat controversial personality." ●

Apr. 15, 1990

The Asthana Vidwan



BORN in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. Mr. Chittibabu, popularly known as ‘Veena’ Chittibabu, started learning veena at the age of five. He gave his full-fledged concert at the age of 12 and gained recognition as a child prodigy. He was the disciple of the late Mahamahapadhyaya Emani Sankara Sastry. Chittibabu had also scored music for a few films. He was a member of the Experts Committee of the Sri Thayagabrahma Mahotsava Sabha, Thiruvaiyaru, and an ‘Asthana Vidwan’ of the Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. Chittibabu had several awards, honours and titles worldwide to his credit.

He was the “Asthana Vidwan”, TTD, and the State Artiste of Tamil Nadu from 1981 to 1987.

He received the Sangeetha Natak Akademi Award in 1990. He was conferred “Kalaprapurna” honorary doctorate by the Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, in 1984. ●

Feb. 11, 1996

Leading exponent of veena

EMANI Sankara Sastry's meteoric rise to fame in Carnatic music not only proved his creative genius but also his traditional family background. The greatness of Sankara Sastry was that he was an artiste with an open mind to receive the essence of the other musical style of the world.

He was exposed to Hindustani and western styles of classical music at a young age and therefore during the formative years of his career, these influences blended into a fine temper and made him an integrationist among artistes. This could be particularly seen in the way he composed music on a variety of themes on several occasions for All India Radio and others. His Vadya Brinda themes are a story by themselves.

Though he played the traditional ragas like his favourite 'Sankarabharanam' or 'Varali' or 'Kambhoji', he was always ready to serve new dishes of musical essence. Belonging to the tradition of vocal-veena artistes, Sankara Sastry used to sing, at times while playing. He entertained the audience with Hindustani medium and also with a couple of western tunes. There was inevitably a 'Veda Pravachanam' on the instrument along with which he sang.

Born in 1922, at Draksharamam in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, Sankara Sastry showed great promise even at the age of three by trying to follow the musical sequences with perfect laya gnaana. He imbibed the skills of not only his father Achyutarama Sastry but also that of his grandfather Emani Subbaraya Sastry, who was a great vainika of his days. But what Sankara Sastry did was to enhance the scope of the instrument. Veena, before him, was played for a limited gathering. He introduced amplification of sound by using the contact mike, given to him by a foreigner. Emani was versatile in playing the instrument on mandara and anumandarasthyai strings. He exploited the scope of the veena to the maximum in creating sounds - even continuous sounds, resembling those from a wind instrument.

However, he had to break his studies.

Achyuta Rama Sastry was not interested in this son taking up music as a career but he had to slowly yield to the grit and determination and hardwork shown by the boy in learning to play the instrument.

Dr. Keskar, then, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting and R.K. Ram Dayani, Secretary, Information and Broadcasting offered Emani a job in All India Radio. Keskar instructed the authorities to attract talent from outside. Emani joined the Madras station of All India Radio on December 1, 1959 as its music producer. In 1961 he shifted to the national orchestra of Delhi AIR, as a composer conductor of its national orchestra. The command and mastery he displayed there, made him soon the chief producer of music and then director of national orchestra. This was another opportunity for him to come out with his creative genius in composing new tunes for his Vadya Brinda programmes.

Emani Sankara Sastry was an interesting combination of the traditional and the modern. If it was a serious concert he stuck to classical tradition and idiom. When it came to presenting his compositions Over radio he was creative. 'Gamakas' were always his strong point and he played them with great virtuosity whatever the raga. His 'swara prasthara' and 'taanam' were always admirable.

According to Sankara Sastry music is an ocean with endless potentialities. As new forms are created fresh ones appeared with limitless possibilities. It was his endeavour to take the ingredients of music and contribute to the happiness of the people through the medium of music and rhythm.

Emani was also a composer of considerable talent. He composed kritis, padams, javalees and tillanas and a raagam-taanam-pallavi in Todi raga for orchestration was a great attempt by itself. Emani disciples include reputed names like Chittibabu, M.Y. Kama Sastry. ●

G. Srihari
Feb 2, 1988

On the frets without fret and fume

THE music wing of Annamalai University (Sangeetha Bhushanam course) was resounding with vocal music and the strains of the veena. Ponnaiah Pillai, Sabesa Iyer, Tiger Varadachariar and Sattur Krishna Iyengar were the veterans in charge of the Carnatic music section teaching the intricacies in the traditional way to bright students.

There was always a highly charged musical atmosphere in the college. It was not actually teaching in the formal way. First-year students would be taught songs when second or third year students would sit and hear and vice versa. Thus there was always an exchange of musical ideas between professors and students and among the latter' said K.P. Sivanandam, son of Ponnaiah Pillai, recalling his early years in Annamalai University.

How come you became a veena vidwan?

I used to go round the music section of the university freely. Many veenas were kept there and I would dabble with them. I used to mix with veena and vocal students and thus I learnt both vocal and veena.

Your father encouraged you in this line?

No, no, no. He never knew that I had been playing on the college veenas. The rooms in the college were such that one could sing or play without anyone watching him.

That was how I learnt the rudiments. And it happened. Sabesa Iyer used to stroll along the campus to watch the activities of the students and he saw me engaged in veena play. He went to my father Ponnaiah Pillai and said that I should be trained in veena. Thus my regular veena lessons started.

What was the kind of practice given to you?

As in vocal music there is akhara practice in veena. All the alankarams had to be learnt swara-wise and akharawise. That is very, very essential. And the alankaras had to be practised in all sampoorana ragas -Todi, Sankarabharamam, Karaharapriya and so on. One student would start with say, Todi and when he finished the next would begin with Karaharapriya.

Thus the lessons would go on. So we had complete control over the instrument in almost all the ragas, both by way of swarams and akharams.

Then the alankaras had to be played the anulomam and pratilomam way. That is the first, second and third kalam of an alankara in Dhruva, Madhya and the five talas. This way laya grip would be gained.

Some veena players frequently sound the tala strings while playing. Why?

It is not tala thanthi, for your information. While playing the main string of the veena, one has to pull it to effect the gamakas. When the string is plucked often, the sruti is likely to be disturbed. So the three strings sounded by the little finger help the veena artiste to set right the sruti alignment of

the main string. The tala strings as they are being called are really sruti strings tuned to sa-pa-sa. The strings have to be gently sounded, not frequently or loudly.

For how many years were you a teacher in Annamalai University?

From 1939 to 1948. My father was against my accepting the job. I took my appointment order and went to receive the blessings of my grandfather Pandanallur Meenakshisundararn Pillai. Do you know how he reacted? "Your father came to nothing by becoming a professor and you



want to follow his footsteps,” he said. There was a reason for such lack of enthusiasm on the part of my grandparent. It so happened that Mysore Veena Seshanna had come to stay for a month in a house opposite to that of my maternal grandfather Kannuswami Pillai, to study some music manuscripts. He was invited by the Tiruppanandal Adheenam to give a cutcheri and Seshanna was paid Rs 1,000. Reminded of this, my grandfather remarked, “Your father as a teacher earned Rs 75 a month and you are accepting a job for Rs. 50”. I worked as a veena professor on a very meagre salary from 1939 to 1948. The next year, I was chosen professor of the Central College of Carnatic Music (now called the Tamil Nadu Music College), Madras and held the post for two years. After leaving the Central College of Carnatic Music, I was only a freelance veena artiste giving performances and playing on All India Radio.

If I remember right, you had been to Sri Lanka too on some assignment.

Swami Vipulananda was doing research on ‘Yazh Nool’. In that connection, I had been there and worked in the Swami Vipulananda Sangeetha Natana Kalluri. The book was later released and I was also honoured with the title, Veena Viththakar. I was also honoured by the Music Academy with the Sangeetha Kalanidhi title. ●

Nov. 24, 1994



Melodic violinist

A violinist who was a fine representative of the classical tradition, Marungapuri Gopalakrishna Iyer had a unique style of fingering and bowing. His rendering of kritis had great melodic quality. Even in his seventies, he did not lose his control over the instrument. Rasikas will remember his fine two-hour recital when he gave a demonstration in 1955 in the city.

Born in Madurai in a musical family, Gopalakrishna Iyer had his initial training under his grandfather, Vidwan Gopu Iyer. Noticing his aptitude, his grandfather took him to Karur Venkatarama Iyer, a violinist who began to teach him music. After three years of training under him in vocal music, he learnt some varnas and kritis and was given an opportunity to sing before Swami Vivekananda in Manamadurai, to the violin accompaniment of his guru.

Two years after this event, the young musician began to lose the melodic quality of his voice and

he took to the violin on the advice of his guru. He began to practise seriously on the violin, when he came under the spell of Ettayapuram Ramachandra Bhagavathar. Later, Gopalakrishna Iyer migrated to Madras, where he came under the discipline of Vidwan Tachur Singarachariar.

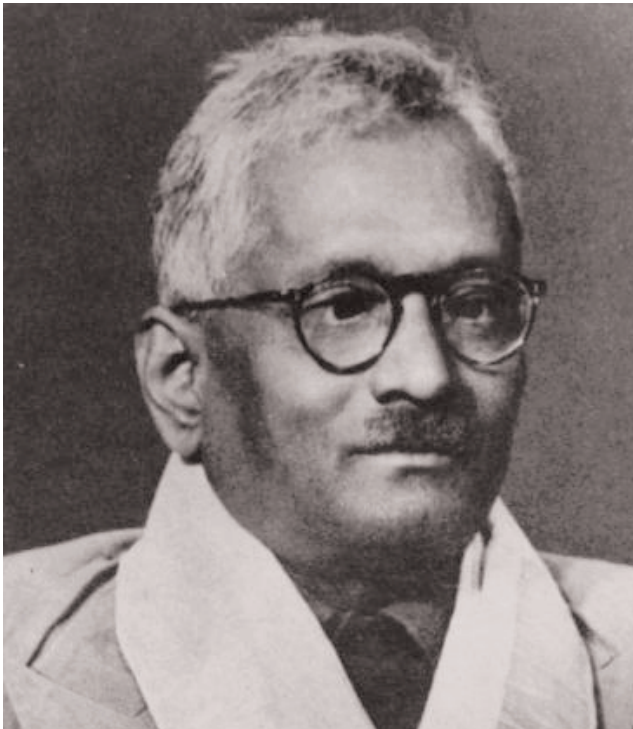
Violinist Govindaswami Pillai, who was very much impressed by Gopalakrishna Iyer, requested him to play along with him. They were a fine violin duo, drawing large audiences. Gopalakrishna Iyer gave several concerts along with Govindaswami Pillai and earned a name. He later became a solo violinist. ●

Mar. 16, 1979

An eminent violinist

DWARAM Venkataswamy Naidu (1893-1964) eminent violinist, was a brilliant soloist, known for deft handling of even intricate ragas and for his gentle and feathery bowing but firm fingering. Although he strictly adhered to traditional Carnatic style in his rendering he was responsive to fresh ideas. Music flowed in his veins and as a noted musicologist once remarked, “he woke up the dumb instrument and produced a feast of melody.”

“Dwaram”, as he was familiarly known to



music lovers, was born in November 1893 in Bangalore, where his father was a commissioned officer in the Army. The family soon migrated to Visakhapatnam, where Dwaram had his education. Attracted by the violin from his early years, he had his early training under his eldest brother, Dwaram Venkatakrishnaiah Naidu. His father too practised on the violin.

He won many laurels for his exquisite handling of the violin. The Mysore Darbar in 1946 decorated him with the title “Sangeetha Ratnakara”. The Andhra University conferred on him the honorary doctorate of “Kalaprapurna” in 1950. He received the President’s award for Carnatic instrumental music in 1953. He was awarded the title of “Padma Sri” in 1957. He was vice-president of the Andhra Pradesh Sangeetha Natak Akademi for three years.

Srimathi Rukmani Devi of the Kalakshetra, paying a tribute to Sri Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu says: “He has adorned our country and blessed it with the beauty of his music.

At this time of cultural revival, when there is deterioration in taste, one cannot afford to lose such a great artiste. His playing of the violin was exquisite”.●

Nov. 26, 1964

A traditional purist

K.S. Venkataramiah (1901-1972), endearingly known as “Papa”, the violin Vidwan had a distinguished career for over 40 years. He was 71 when he died.

Papa Venkatramiah had given over 1,000 solo recitals and had accompanied eminent musicians like Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Palladam Sanjiva Rao, A purist who never sacrificed tradition, he was the disciple of the late Malaikkottai Govindaswami Pillai spending over 13 years of gurukulvasa. He was also a student of veena Dhanammal.

Born in Karur, he had initial training in violin under his father K.N. Srikantiah, who was also a renowned player and later under Sangita Kalanidhi Chinnaswami Aiyar. He was the Asthana Vidwan in Travancore and served as Professor in the Music College, Trivandrum, in 1963.

Papa Venkataramiah was conferred with the title of Sangita Kalanidhi by the Music Academy in 1962 and was honoured by the State Sangita Nataka Sangam in 1967.

NMN writes: Papa Venkatramiah’s death has deprived the Carnatic music world of yet another stalwart. He was as great a musician as he was a violinist, with the result his instrumental art invariably bore the stamp of a matchless distinction. The style was that of his master, Malaikkottai Govindaswami Pillai. So also were the graces and refinement. Both in form and content, his music was so singularly aristocratic, aesthetically complete and traditionally rich that it became at once the example and envy of even the idealist vocalist.

Venkataramiah’s approach to his art was a shining example of dedicated passion and sadhaka. He kept his art unsullied by professional considerations and expressed his love for it by practising it to the last days of his life.

As a musician who set store by quality, he picked up a kirtana repertoire that was strikingly high-brow in respect of taste and authentic padanthara. The treasure included quite a collection of expressive padhams and javalis learnt

in the vintage tradition. His bowing, strong and bold, and his fingering technique imparted a vibrant verve, liveliness and melody to his kirtana interpretations and their neraval and swara embellishments.

Papa Venkataramiah was outstanding for his raga essays which were brilliantly structured around an integrated idea of the essential features. There was a well-introduced beginning, a well-developed middle theme and a well-resolved conclusion. In fact, they were so full of substance that the resourceful musician could draw copiously on the ideas for development. Flute T.R. Mahalingam, for instance, had the benefit of Papa Venkatramiah’s sterling support in his younger days and was considerably influenced by him in raga gnana. Apart from Todi, Kalyani, Kambhoji and Sankarabaranam, Papa Venkatramiah will be remembered for the extraordinary grace and colour of high interpretation of aesthetic ragas like Begada, Sahana, Varali, Harikambhoji, Yadukulakambhoji, Bhairavi, Manirangu, Devagandhari, Sourashtram, etc.

Another aspect of classical music in which Papa Venkatramiah’s music was unmatched was the thanam. He practised a special jumping technique of bowing learnt from his master Govindaswarni Pillai and his thanams invariably came through with a warmth, measured gait and intensity that rendered the vocalist’s effort anaemic by contrast. ●

May 19, 1972

An excellent accompanist

VIOLIN maestro Kumbakonam Rajamanickam Pillai was an accompanist nonpareil. True, he excelled in solo performance as well. But music circles would remember him more as a “Dharmapatni”, “Sahadharmini” and musician violinist. In fact, the great instrumentalist emphasised in an interview some years ago to *Sport & Pastime* that the role of a violinist is only subordinate to that of the vocalist.

On the occasion of the centenary of his birth, it is a delight to recall some of the sage sayings in that interview. He said, “It may be that the vocalist holds the public gaze for a time. But that should not impel the violinist to try and steal his thunder however much his own capacity might be in succeeding in such an effort”. Pillai had an excellent reason to play the role of an accompanist to a vocalist. It provides a refreshing and useful experience and augments his music knowledge. Such an observation from a great master reveals the unmatched humility in him.

Asked whether there was a difference in vocal and violin practice, he said there was no separate method for the violinist. As for the number of sangatis the artiste could indulge in while rendering the kritis, he said, “There is no hard and fast rule. But only those sangatis which are accepted by tradition and rendered by past masters I play. Kirtanams are my basis. When challenged, the violinist must be capable of rendering vocally”.

In an earlier interview, a senior musician had said that a senior violinist should not be averse to playing for junior vocalists and when I raised this subject with Pillai, he said. “I have no objection to play for a junior if he feels sincerely that it is an opportunity for him to learn something from a more experienced man in the field.”

Rajamanickam was born on August 5, 1898, in Kumbakonam. He belonged to the Isai Vellalar community which has produced many famous dancers and musicians.

Rajamanickam’s mother Kamalathammal passed away before he was three and the responsibility of bringing up the child fell on his sister Rathinammal, who did a great job in nurturing his talent.

His first guru was Kandaswami Pillai, a nagaswara vidwan, who taught vocal music. It was developed by Tiruvisanallur “Pallavi” Narayanaswami Iyer and Pandanallur Chinnaswami Pillai. About this time occurred an incident which turned Pillai into a violinist. There was an old violin lying in the heap of unused articles in the house. Rajamanickam took it and produced a few melodic sounds. An astrologer was consulted who said that the boy would become a great stringed instrumentalist.

Accidentally passing his house, violin veteran Tirukodikaval Krishna Aiyar heard melodic sounds of violin. He at once took Rajamanickam under his care and later passed him on to one of his sishyas, Tirukodikaval Ramaswamy Iyer, to develop his art further. The sishya did not belie Krishna Aiyar’s vision. Opportunities come to sincere learners. Namakkal Narasimha Iyengar freely shared his knowledge with the youngster.

Rajamanickam’s first concert was in 1916 sponsored by the Zamindar of Andipatti. Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar, the Zamindar’s confidant, suggested Rajamanickam’s name and he played violin for Alangudi Natesa Bhagavatar. It was a big success.

Rajamanickam Pillai seldom spoke, but when he did he would emphasise the importance of sticking to tradition and aiming for the total success of the concert rather than strive for personal glorification. Even after a hundred years, Rajamanickam Pillai’s name lives on. He has left behind a host of sishyas to carry on the Rajamanickam tradition. ●

K. Sundar Rajan
Nov.20, 1998

Fascinating fingering

SANGITA Ratnakara T. Chowdiah (1895-1967), an eminent violinist and a brilliant accompanist, was known for his fascinating fingering and bowing techniques. His solo concerts too were reputed for clarity and creative approach. He popularised the seven stringed violin. Sri Chowdiah was the recipient of the



Presidential Award for Carnatic Music (Instrumental) in 1957. He established the “Ayyanar College of Music” in Bangalore for the promotion of South Indian music.

Born in Trimkudlu in Mysore on January 1, 1895, he was a student of Sri Bidaram Krishnappa, a stalwart among the vocalists and accompanied him on the violin for a long time. He was honoured with the title of “Sangeetha Ratna” by the Maharaja of Mysore in 1940 and was nominated to the Mysore Legislative Council to represent Arts in 1962. The Madras Music Academy conferred on him the title of “Sangita Kalanidhi” in 1957.

In a tribute to Sri Chowdiah, Sri Madurai Mani Iyer said: “Sri Chowdiah was one of the senior-most violinists who had made a great name for himself in Carnatic music. He always wished to perfect his art and to this end, he practised even to the last day of his life.” ●

Jan. 21, 1967

The playing fingers play on

It was not an era when any gifted child in music was tomtomed as a child prodigy and presented to the public with media blitz. If the publicity system as at present had been in vogue in those days, T.N. Krishnan, the reputed, violinist, should have been acclaimed as a violin wizard even as a boy of nine. But perhaps because he had been gradually, nurtured and made climb the ladder of eminence, in short steps, today he stands head and shoulders above many violin accompanists. In his sixth year his father T. Narayana Iyer put a violin in his hand and started lessons.

What was your practice schedule during those days?

It started at 4 a.m. My father would wake me up. Practice started immediately from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m. Then I had coffee and a break for half-an-hour. Again the lessons were continued till 9.30 a.m. till I started for my school. During the lunch interval between 2 p.m. and 3p.m. had another short practice for half-an-hour. In the evening again from 4 to 7. My father is a taskmaster and today I am what I am because of him.

You learnt many kirtanas from the vidwans who visited your house.

Exactly. There was Appadorai Bhagavathar, a court musician, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Desamangalam Subhramania Sastri, veena vidwan, Ennaipadain Venkatarama Bhagavathar and so on. My father used to present me before them and they taught me kirtanas.

There was an upanayanam function at Trichur, when Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, accompanied by Mysore Chowdiah, was to sing.

Chowdiah did not turn up. I was present at the function. "Here is Krishnan. Let him replace Chowdiah," called Chembai and so I sat with my violin. It was a thrilling experience, you see, suddenly compelled to take on the role of a very experienced and senior vidwan.

There is an impression that your violin play full of gamakas is greatly influenced by accompanying Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar quite often.

Yes, to some extent. But even before I started accompanying him I had become familiar with Ariyakudi bhani, and in fact had learnt many songs. Alleppey K. Parthasarathy Iyengar, Papa as he was called, was an admirer of Ariyakudi and the vidwan used to stay in his house. He had learnt many songs directly under Ariyakudi. From him I



learnt kirtanas. So, when I accompanied Ariyakudi later I had absolutely no difficulty in following him.

How did you become Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer's disciple?

In the war years, during evacuation, we shifted from Ernakulam, our native place to Trivandrum, where I was greatly encouraged by Prof.R. Srinivasan. During the Navarathri festival in the Trivandrum palace all the musicians would gather, Musiri Subramania Iyer. Tanjore Vaidyanatha Iyer. Boodalur Krishnamurthy Sastrigal, Palghat Mani Iyer, Papa Venkataramaiah and others. Then Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer was the Principal of the Swati Tirunal Music Academy. My father asked me once on such an occasion to play before the vid-

wan group. They decided that I should be guided by a vocalist. After discussion among themselves they decided on Semmangudi, who was also based in Trivandrum.

It was then that suddenly my father was transferred to Nagercoil. I was studying both at school and under Semmangudi. My father was in a dilemma as to what to do with me. Semmangudi suggested I could stay in his house, attend school and also get music training. As the sishyas used to practise Semmangudi would start singing himself and high musical values were learnt by me on such occasions. He would sing sometimes for two or three hours.

Flute Mali liked my play. He had a performance in the RR Sabha Hall. He telegraphed to Semmangudi to send me from Trivandrum to accompany him. I was sent to Madras. In a day or two, Semmangudi too came to Madras for a performance. Mali's cutcheri was over. For Semmangudi, Mysore Chowdiah and Palani Subramaniya Pillai were scheduled, but Chowdiah failed to turn up. So, I sat with

Semmangudi.

How much were you getting in those days?

Mali, Maharajapurarn Viswanatha Iyer and almost all senior vidwans gave Rs. 125. I joined the Central College of Carnatic Music in 1964 as Professor and in 1978 became the Principal from 1985-93. I was the Head of the Department of the University of Delhi. ●

Sep.3, 1994

From mud lamp flicker to effulgence

FOR Lalgudi Jayaraman's widespread vidwat, the taproots lay in a small un electrified room in Lalgudi village, where only two things disturbed the peace and tranquillity of the place - one the birdcalls at break of dawn and the other Sa-Ri-Ga-Ma-Pa-Da-Ni-Sa or the majestic Bhairavi Viriboni varnam from the strings of Lalgudi's violin.

"My father would wake me up at 4 a.m. My mother would have already filled up the mud-lamp (agal) with oil and wick. Lighting it I would just wash my face, take up my violin and start practising vigorously. If the stern sound, "hmm" came from my father lying in his bed next to me it was an indication something was wrong. I would correct myself. The practice would go on till seven, or eight and similar sessions were held during the rest of the day". Lalgudi said, "Thyagaraja had set his foot in our house when my great-grand -father Rama Iyer invited the saint to LaIgudi on his way from Srirangam. That good fortune I treasure most and that perhaps, accounts for my sangeetha."

What was the kind of practice you were given?

I had to play all the varisais in each ragam.

My father would prepare a time-table of kirtanas I should practise everyday from Monday to Sunday. Every week, I had to practise according to the schedule under the vigilant eyes of my father. Excluding the vivadi melas I had to play all the melakarta ragas.



When was your first performances as a violinist?

It was in the Saptarisheeswara Swami temple, when I accompanied S a t t u r Subramaniam. I had played quite often in the company of T.K. Rangachari, S.V. Parthasarathy, Negerkoil Harihara Iyer and others. My uncle (Periappa) was M a d u r a i K a n d a s w a m y Bhagavathar, a violinist. My grandfather Valadi Radhakrishna Iyer was also a violinist , who accompanied only Patnam Subramania Iyer and Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer.

So all their genes have got into your musical structure.

All of them were contemporaries of Madurai Pushpavanam, Vedantha Bhagavathar, Mazhavarayanendal Subbarama Bhagavathar and such giants. Thirukkodikaval Krishna Iyer, a contemporary of my grandfather, had come to our house once. Next to our residence there was

a Perumal Koil. Krishna Iyer went with his violin to sleep in the temple. He got up exactly at four in the morning and unmindful of the place or the environment, he started playing the violin, a common feature with almost all vidwans of those days. Coming to think of it, I can say emphatically that the quiet and peaceful village atmosphere was the essential factor that contributed to the purity of Nada.

How were you taught kirtanas?

Nothing should be put in writing. How can you get the gamakas, jarus, kuzhaivus (Mellifluity) on a paper. Everything has to be stored only in memory.

How would your father judge your cutcheries?

After each cutcheri, I must write down in a note book a review of my own play- where I had gone wrong, where the exposition was not aesthetic, what were the deficiencies and so on. I must go through my self-criticism and correct myself. My father was very particular that I hear the great vidwans like Mazhavarayanendal Subbarama Bhagavathar, Tiger Varadachariar and such people whose music was an ocean.

Where was your first cutcheri with Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar?

It was in the Pudukkottai Thyagaraja festival. From 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Palladam Sanjeevi Rao played the flute. From 9 p.m. Ariyakudi was to sing to the scheduled accompaniment of Papa

Ventakaramaiah and Palghat Mani. In the last minute Papa sent a telegram he was unable to make the trip, Ariyakudi looked around and asked, "Is Madurai Kandaswamy Bhagavathar's nephew, the young Jayaraman here? Ask him to play," he said. That was my debut with Ariyakudi. My first cutcheri in Madras was at the Siva Vishnu Temple in Mambalam.

In 1948, I accompanied K.V. Narayanaswamy in the December season of the Music Academy in the afternoon session (3-30 p.m.) Vidwans had heard that a young man from Lalgudi was playing well and so G.N.B., Alathur Brothers, Semmagudi Srinivasa Iyer, Chembai and Chowdiah were all seated before me during that performance. It was really a testing moment for me.

You have so many disciples. What are their attitude to learning methods in the light of your own experience?

The parents are very anxious to put their children on the dais as quickly as possible. They easily forget the sahityas and other musical nuances explained to them. The present day style of living is not conducive to climbing up the ladder the hard way. Tapes seem to be their sustenance. ●

Oct. 28, 1994

At ease with North and South

THE walls, bricks, windows and doors of M.S. Gopalakrishnan's ancestral house into which I was ushered seemed to have absorbed the Parur style of violin play for seven decades and more. "I was born in this house in 1931," he said with justifiable pride. "My father taught me both Carnatic and Hindustani styles of music. I owe everything to him. He would insist on practice from 4 a.m. daily. The sarali varisais, varnams had to be practised in three kalams and in one string without changing over to the other strings. That was an essential feature on which he laid great stress".

I was six when the violin course began and in my tenth year, I was fit for a solo performance. Even before that I used to play with my father. In 1939, My first cutcheri with him was at the All-Bengal Music Conference in Calcutta.

Pandit Omkarnath Thakur was present at the concert. He was so impressed with me that he asked me to accompany him the very next day at the conference. I had accompanied D.V. Paluskar and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and participated in jugalbandi with Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute), Amjad Ali Khan (sarod) and V.G. Jog (violin). I was ten when I accompanied Sandhyavandanam Srinivasa Rao. I had given a solo performance in the Jagannatha Bhakta Jana Sabha.

Did you continue to play Hindustani solo even after you gained recognition as a Carnatic Violinist?

I was making myself well-equipped in Hindustani style. After my father's death, I learnt Hindustani Music from Krishnanand. He taught me the Kirana Gharana. Abdul Kareem Khan and Bhimsen Joshi were my teachers too.

In your playing one can discern a special style of bowing and fingering.

I devoted much attention to bowing. I listened to the records of great violinists of the West such as Chrysler whose bowing produces a clear sound. I try to adopt their bowing technique to the extent possible. But there is one difficulty. In the West, when they play the violin, the bow moves on the strings horizontally. Here, we keep the violin in a slant and so the tendency is for the bow to slide downwards.

That aspect has to be borne in mind and the bow should move at the same place below the bridge uni-

formly. I am particular about this technique. Vallinam and mellinam should be produced with the use of the full bow and fingering. My father taught different methods of bowing -- thanavil, staccato bowing, playing on one string to the top of the finger board and so on.

Do you think that by merely listening to Chrysler or Menuhin one can adopt their style of bowing?

I had an eight-month course in Musee Musicals, Madras, on Western bowing and fingering technique. The way of holding the bow, the pressure to be exerted on the strings, production of thick and thin sound. All these play an important part in the tonal excellence of the violin. I have put all these aspects into diligent practice. That, I think, has paid rich dividends.

What are your guidelines for Carnatic music?

First and foremost, a violinist must be a vocalist. He need not be a master, but must first learn to sing the kirtanas. Only then he can feel the bhava of the song. This will help in playing the song on the violin without padacheda, that is mutilation of the sahitya. My father used to say that while playing a kirtana, the artiste must realise that each sangati was a dedication to God. No new kirtana should be played in public without achieving perfection by practice at home.

Each up-and-coming musician has his favourite team of violinists and mridangists. They are well-rehearsed. The line of old musicians has almost come to an end. The new ones have their own attitudes, approaches and preferences regarding performing techniques and the choice of accompanists. Today, I prefer solo to an accompanying role. At present, the status of a musician depends on his liaison work.

Concert duration has shrunk to two hours against the four-and-a-half to five hours some decades ago. Your opinion?

It was not only the duration that mattered. The contents of the performance too counted. Those days, the interaction between a vocalist and a violinist was such to inspire manodharma mutually. I have learnt several nuances of Carnatic music from those great artistes. ●

Jan. 7, 1995

Mother's vision fulfilled

THOUGH infantile jaundice robbed him of his sight when he was just four months old, M. Chandrasekharan, never let the handicap hamper him in the field of music. What he lost physically has perhaps, been more than adequately compensated by his deep insight into the nuances and beauty of Carnatic music.

"I was groomed by my mother and mother alone," Chandrasekharan said. How much she sacrificed for me! She was a top class violinist herself who could accompany any musician. I lost my father when I was seven and so we left Kanpur, where my father was employed in a private cotton mill. We came over to Madras when I was eight years old and I cannot convey in words the efforts my mother took to make me a fullfledged vocalist and a violinist.

When was your initiation?

It was in my seventh year. But before that, as my mother used to sing, I had acquired knowledge of kirtanas although I did not know the lakshana side. In fact, my mother started me on vocal music when I was five. In four years, I was well-equipped to give a violin concert. I had vocal training too. The combination, I think, expedited my progress.

When was your first performance in Madras? Who was your mother's guru?

In 1948, when I was 11. Mother and I performed a duet at the Mylapore Thyagaraja Vidwat Samajarn during the Thyagaraja Utsavam.

I learnt to sing a number of kirtanas from Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavata. He came three days in a week to our house and taught me nearly 75 to 80 kirtanas. Meantime, after hearing me in one of the performances, S. Ramachandra Iyer, who was associated with the Music Academy, suggested that I take part in the competition the Academy held every year. I was diffident, but took part and won a prize.

You are a regular accompanist in the Academy season. How did this come about?

In 1951, I accompanied T. Viswanathan (flute) in the 3 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. slot. I got chances to accompany senior vidwans. At a marriage conducted in my house, GNB had agreed to sing and my relatives suggested I play the violin. I went to GNB's house. He was not keen to hear me. But protocol demanded that he heard me before the cutcheri. GNB's guru, Madurai Subramania Iyer, was also there. I played and they were pleased. In March 1952, I accompanied M a h a r a j a p u r a m Viswanatha Iyer at the Kapali temple festival. Soon



I was accompanying

Ariyakudi and Chembai, besides Maharajapuram Viswanathan Iyer and others.

Did you seek help to hone your skills?

Of course. I learnt many pallavis from Viswanathan, one of the Kumbakonam Brothers. In 1954, the Music Academy offered padam classes conducted by T. Jayamma. I attended the classes for four years and learnt Bhava sangeetham. The course helped me see a new dimension of music. Vidyala Narasimhulu Naidu, guru of D.K. Pattammal, taught me a number of pallavis. He was generous in imparting his knowledge. I learnt nearly 15 to 20 pallavis under Vidyala Narasimhulu Naidu.

What is your ideal?

I must reflect the musician's bhani. Each sings differently Balamurali, GNB, Madurai Mani Iyer, Maharajapuram. I aim at mirroring their style. Once T.N. Rajaratnam Pillai heard my performance. I played Todi and later Kadanakuthohalam. He just held my left palm and said, "This hand that played Kadanakuthohalam so well today is destined to play many ragas beautifully". ●

Feb. 24, 1995

Unravelling the mysteries of Nada

THE walls in his house display charts explaining the ancient texts on Nadavidya - Sangita Yoga. Pranayamam, the mystic syllable Om, the journey of Nada from the mooladhara to sahasrara and so on. As he talked about his present research interest in this field. V.V. Subramaniam, the violin vidwan, grew passionate and almost fanatic in his zeal to understand the source of Nada.

“I have embarked on this quest and also established a research organisation Nada Brahman to delve deep into the mysteries to Nada in the light of ancient treatises.”

Before coming to this stage, you started just as any other violinist. How was the foundation laid?

First and foremost, ours is a musical family and nothing but music pervaded the house at all times of the day. We belong to Vadakancheri though my father came and settled in Madras when I was one-year old. My father, Vadakancheri Veeraraghava Bhagavathar was both a violinist and vocalist, having undergone training under Tirukkalanur Narayanaswamy Iyer, violinist. My mother too could play violin. My grandfather learnt music under Parameswara Bhagavathar, a direct disciple of Vadivelu, who adorned the Travancore court. In this way, I can say, I inherited the tradition of Swathi Thirunal and Muthuswamy Dikshitar through Vadivelu. My father also learnt under Umayalpuram Swaminatha Iyer and thus I can say I also inherited the Thyagaraja line of Sishyaparampara. My maternal grandfather Ernakulam Rama Bhagavathar was a mridangam artiste.

When did you start learning violin?

In my seventh year under my father. I was taught both violin and vocal music because my father was firmly of the opinion that vocal music must form the basis of any instrumentalist, particularly violinist because as an accompanist, a violinist must be quite familiar with the sahitya.

At 4 a.m. I would be woken up and play till 7 a.m. then prepare for the school. During lunch interval another hour of practice. Again in the evening from 5 p.m.. My father will first sing, then asked me to sing. Translate it on the violin. The lessons progressed from sangati to sangati. One thing I must emphasise here. He would not only sing the sangati but demonstrate how each vidwan - Ariyakudi, Semmangudi, Chembai, GNB, Madurai Iyer would render according to the nature of their voice and make me play in the styles of all vocalists.

Your father seemed to have bestowed all his care on you to gain competence in all respects possible.

Not only that, he would take me to other violin vidwans and ask me to play before them. T.N. Krishnan's father was a very good friend of my father. One day, he came to our house and I was asked to play before him. “I shall take your boy under my care. Send him to me,” he said. My tutelage under him began and lasted for two years.

Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar greatly encouraged me. In fact, he was responsible for my arangetram in the Guruvayoor temple in 1954, when I was ten. I have learnt many things from him. His style of singing was quite different from his style of teaching. He would emphasise gamakas while teaching.

Ours is a musical family and nothing but music pervaded the house at all times of the day.

On many fronts your father exposed you to master the instrument.

There was one kind of practice I was subjected to. I would be asked to play *Sri Raja Rajeswari* a varnam in Mayarnalavagowla. I must repeat the varnam in other ragas like Chakravakam, Sankarabharanam, Karaharapriya and the like to get a clear understanding of the features of each raga. This way swaragnana too would improve. I had done this exercise many times.

Chembai is a great soul. He himself told me. You go to Musiri. He will initiate you into bhava sangita. Chembai, every now and then would praise the bowing technique of Malaikottai Govindaswami Pillai and held him up for emulation by me. Chembai also taught me several pallavis. Till the end, I was nurtured with parental affection by Chembai though intermittently I had guidance from Musiri, Semmangudi, GNB, Madurai Mani and others.

This overall equipment has helped you play for any musician with ease.

Yes, I have played for M.S. Subbulakshmi for nearly 12 years. I have always admired her cutcheri pantha. As far as the bhakti element in music, I have been greatly influenced by her. Many have been my benefactors. One day, Easwaran, the husband of D.K. Pattammal came to our house and told me, “come to our house after your examinations are over”. I did as he wanted. The very next day he asked me to accompany DKP and thereafter I had been asked to team up with her. In fact, in 1950 at the instance of Easwaran I had a chance to play in the Music Academy, From 1959-62 I accompanied DKP, From 1962, GNB took me to his performances. Thus my career my progressing satisfactorily. ●

Mar. 10, 1995

Blessings from Acharya, pat from Mali

SHE was a little bit undecided as to where to start her narration of her career as violinist of repute. She thought out the landmarks and suddenly as if light dawned on her T. Rukmini spoke. “Even today I get thrilled when I recall the incident.” She stopped for a moment, perhaps to have an actionreplay of the situation on the Tunga river bank’ “My father and I were going to the Sringeri Ashramam and as we were walking, from the opposite side the Sringeri Acharya was coming towards us. I fell at his feet. He blessed me and gave two oranges”. What she left unsaid was obvious “The asirvadam of the Sringeri Acharya has guided my career as a violinist”.

“Such was my auspicious beginning. “I started learning both violin and vocal when I was seven under R.R. Kesavamurty, a disciple of Bidaram Krishnappa and a colleague of Chowdiah who was also learning under that great master. This study continued for three or four years. He taught me many songs. When I was 12 or 13, I started accompanying local musicians. My debut as a violin accompanist was at Rama Mandir, Bangalore, during the Rama Navami festival”.

What do you think was the turning point in your career?

When I was 15, I was asked to accompany Flute Mali in a performance arranged at the Town Hall, Bangalore. It was a benefit recital. Mali was so famous that the hall and the space round about were overflowing with listeners. Mali was at his best on that day and played uninterruptedly for over four hours. The raga, tanam and pallavi was in Ranjani. As usual, he started on ragamalika swaras. Alternately, we played swaras in one raga after another and the listeners, were thrilled. Suddenly Mali stopped. There was pin-drop silence in the hall. Mali started speaking. Pointing to me, he said: “This young girl is playing exceedingly well. She has a very bright future” and took his flute and that took me by surprise. Since then I almost became

a regular accompanist for Mali. Playing as an accompanist to Mali was both a challenge and a thrilling experience. I gained many insights into music by hearing Mali quite often.

I was married in 1962 and came over to Madras. Since then my career has been carefully nurtured by my husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law , who evinced keen interest in Carnatic music.

From 1963, I came under LaIgudi Jayaraman and also at the feet of Semmangudi. Lalgudi would teach me kritis, tillanas, how much oscillation - asaivu - should be given to swaras. Such nuances I learnt from him.

One advantage to you is you are a vocalist and violinist as well.

Vocal music has certainly helped me in handling violin. I learn all the kirtanas vocally so that I can know the sahitya well. This has helped me in the use of sahitya bowing.

How would you like to evaluate your career?

It is satisfactory. I cannot express in words my gratitude to the several senior vidwans who encouraged me at a time when a woman violinist as an accompanist raised eye-brows. That I consider as my good fortune. ●

Feb. 3, 1995

My aim is to satisfy all sections of audience

SHOWING an extraordinary felicity of musical expression through his artistry on the violin, Kunnakudi R. Vaidyanathan is an expert artiste in his own right, keen on structuring his recitals in compartments of contents, which would separately satisfy different sections of the audience.

Born in Kunnakudi, in erstwhile Rarnanathapuram district, in 1935, to K u n n a k u d i Ramaswamy Sastri and Meenakshi Ammal, the boy did not show any taste for music while his father was himself a violinist, exponent in Ramayana upanyasa, Sanskrit scholar and a teacher in the local patasala (S h a n m u k h a Vidyasala).

“It was indeed a miracle”, says the artiste. “That I was initiated by my father to learn playing on the violin under him unexpectedly when the regular violinist (Haridas Ramachandrachar) did not turn up for the karthigai festival celebrated at the local temple. I was then a boy of nine years and within a short spell of 11 months, I was able to accompany my sisters”. This first public performance of the boy was praised by Haridas Ramachandrachar himself.

Excerpts from the interview :

Attracting the audience with your amazing artistry on the violin, you have earned the dis-

inction in the world of Carnatic music as a versatile violinist and an outstanding director of music in the realm of the silver screen What made you to choose this type of a simultaneous career?

Film music of those days was based on Carnatic tunes. I met G. Ramanathan at Modern Theatres in Salem. When I played the piece, ‘Kripayapalaya’ (Charukesi), he exclaimed, “You play classical music so well. Why do you aspire to enter the film music world?” Instantly, he asked me to play any film song tuned by him. My immediate recital o f “Manmathaleelayai” in the same raga gave him immense satisfaction. I joined his orchestra.



After some years, I joined the troupe of S.M. Subbaiya Naidu. T.A. Kalyanam of His Master’s Voice gave me an opportunity to set some devotional songs to tune for Soolamangalam Sisters. The piece “Tiruparamkunrathil

ni sirithaal” is the first devotional song by me. I became a regular accompanist to Soolamangalam Sisters in their recitals. In 1969 I made my debut as a music director in A.P. Nagarajan’s ‘Va Raja Va’. So far I have directed and composed music for 40 pictures.

How did your association and experience with stalwarts influence your advancement?

I have the blessings of my father's close friend, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar who asked me in 1946 to accompany him in his concert at the temple of Lord Krishna in Karaikudi on the day of Vaikunta Ekadasi. The greatness this doyen revealed during this concert was in his having rendered only those ragas and kritis known to me already. Vidwan Karaikudi Muthu Iyer played on the mridangam in this concert. I am an ardent admirer of Mysore T. Chowdaiah who played enrapturingly on his violin with seven strings. Tiruvalangadu Sundaresa Iyer was an inspiring violinist who gave the raga's essence in a single line.

Interested in introducing novelties, I have played as a violin accompanist in a recital of the great nagaswaram player and in a recital of the clarinet maestro, A.K.C.Natarajan.

As an accompanist, I have participated in a large number of recitals given by the great vainika, S. Balachander. My association and experience with all these star performers greatly influenced my advancement. My performance objective is to satisfy all sections of an audience.

When was your first solo performance? How did you feel about it?

I have been giving solo recitals from 1965. The way in which I was able to delight the different sections of the audience gave me much satisfaction. It was in 1974 that my urge for innovation led me to have the maestro, Valayapatti A.R. Subramaniam to support me on the thavil. The enthusiasm with which this recital was received by the audience enabled me to have the support of A.R. Subramaniam in a large number of succeeding concerts.

Approximation to vocal artistry is the goal of an ideal Carnatic instrumentalist. I apply the bowing techniques such as swaravil, sahityavial etc. and gamakas to realise this effect as far as possible.●

*R. Venkatarathnam
Dec. 05, 1997*