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## **MUSIC**

### **Semmangudi looks back - at 90**

**The great Master of theory and practice relives Carnatic music in the twentieth century.**

He is the Pitamaha of Carnatic music. Nine decades of living by, because of and for music has earned Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer this respectful and affectionate accolade. Slightly bent and looking frail - but not in speech or convictions - Semmangudi, the uncompromising traditionalist, remains the ultimate authority in the theory and practice of Carnatic music.

In his 90 years, Semmangudi has seen Carnatic music emerge from temples onto sabha stages and to the farthest shores. He has also seen the music, or rather its practice, metamorphose - from being the preserve of professional families to being a shared cultural experience of common people.

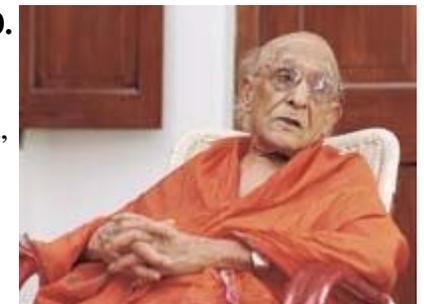
For Semmangudi, the journey began in 1908. His cousin Narayanaswamy Iyer nurtured Semmangudi's talent initially and then it was taken up by Sakharama Rao and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer. Semmangudi developed a style of his own in which the nasality, which bothered him in his youth, became a distinguished hallmark.

#### **Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, the Pitamaha of Carnatic music, at 90.**

Although a traditionalist, he introduced many novelties in the works of composers ranging from Swati Tirunal to Ambujam Krishna. He also popularised rare ragas such as Bhavapriya, Salaghabhairavi and Narayanagowla.

Semmangudi's technical competence and analytical proficiency make him a natural teacher. His patience and personalised attention has produced many an excellent musician and instructor. The teacher in him emerged the best when he was Principal of the Swati Tirunal

S. THANTHONI



Music College, Thiruvananthapuram, for almost a quarter century. During his tenure he did much to popularise Carnatic music in Kerala. Among his rare distinctions is the great qualitative contribution he has made to the development of M.S. Subbulakshmi's transporting music, and the fact that she acknowledges him as her *guru*.

Semmangudi has been showered with awards including the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan (by the Government of India), Isai Perarignar (Tamil Nadu Government), the Kalidas Samman (Madhya Pradesh Government) and the most prestigious in the Carnatic music world, the Sangita Kalanidhi award of the Music Academy, Chennai.

In a *tour de force* lasting four hours, Semmangudi spoke to chitravina (gotuvadyam) prodigy **N. Ravikiran**, and *Frontline* Special Correspondent **Asha Krishnakumar**, tracing his long journey in the world of music, analysing the changing nature of the art, and its enduring strength. His eyes glistened as he relived treasured experiences and moments, and spoke of music and musicians then and now.

Excerpts from the interview (R.K. refers to Ravikiran and A.K. to Asha Krishnakumar):

**R.K.:** *Can you share with us your memories of your early life?*

I was born on July 25, 1908 in the house of my maternal uncle, violin exponent Krishna Iyer, in Tirukkodikaval (in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu). My uncle died when I was four. My parents were in Semmangudi, my father was taking care of our lands. He used to sing *bhajans* in the temple during *ekadasi* (the eleventh day after full and new moon days, considered auspicious).

I did not get the benefit of formal education as there was no school nearby. The nearest schools were in Kodavasal, 10 km north, or Tiruvarur, 13 km east. There was no bus facility, and one would have had to walk all the way. So I had no way of going to school. This troubled me. I really missed going to school. That is why I know neither English nor Malayalam nor Hindi nor even Tamil well (smiles mischievously). The only language I know is music.

**R.K.:** *How did you get started on music?*

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**In July 1939, in Tiruchi.**

My aunt's (mother's sister) son was the famous violinist Semmangudi Narayanaswamy Iyer. He was also living in Semmangudi. He started me on music on a Vijayadasami day. I did well. I learnt a number of *varnams* from him. He gave a lot of *kutcheris* (concerts) and I accompanied him to all of them. It was a great experience. He moved on to Kumbakonam, but I could not for some personal reasons.

I continued to learn music and had the opportunity to listen to great musicians in temples and at marriages: in those days no marriage was complete without three days of music concerts. I was

 influenced considerably. When I was 15 or so I went to hear the famous gotuvadyam exponent Thiruvadaimaruthur Sakharama Rao at a wedding concert. Everything was going well, till he heard some noise that distracted him. Immediately, he stopped playing and left, instructing the organisers to take back the advance given to him. (This is an illustration of his reverence to the art and his attitude towards those who did not share that.) He then came to my house, ate a meal, heard me sing and asked my mother to send me with him. I think it was in 1924 that I went off with Sakharama Rao. It was a turning point in my life.

Under Sakharama Rao, I underwent rigorous training; he would scold, and even beat, me if I made a mistake. The traditional *gurukula* way of instruction - where learning was direct and based on oral instruction, rather than from notations and cassettes - enriches music. It was an all-round, complete training, starting very early every day.

Sakharama Rao had many disciples. Among the notable ones were Devakottai Narayana Iyengar (the veena vidwan), Gotuvadyam Narayana Iyengar (the gotuvadyam vidwan and grandfather of Ravikiran), Ramani Iyer, Sundaram Iyer and Hari Rao (Sakharama Rao's brother).

**In the Travancore Palace in Thiruvananthapuram, where Semmangudi went on the invitation of Maharani Sethu Parvati Bai of Travancore to edit and popularise the compositions of Swati Tirunal; circa 1953. The teacher in Semmangudi emerged the best when he was Principal of the Swati Tirunal Music College, Thiruvananthapuram, for almost a quarter century.**

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**R.K.:** *You have often told me that you were inspired by listening to many concerts, especially nadaswaram concerts. Can you share those experiences?*

In those days temples used to draw many great musicians. Temples, in some sense, propagated music. Ramaswamy Iyer, who lived in our town, usually performed "Kandhasashti *utsavam*" at the temple. Those were among the most memorable moments in my life. Some of the great musicians came to perform at the *utsavam*. Notable among them were Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Madurai Pushpavanam Iyer, Sharabha Sastri, Panchapakesa Sastri, Govindaswamy Pillai, Rajamanikkam Pillai and so on. Their music was divine, glorious and extraordinary.

**R.K.:** *What are your views on nadaswaram music?*

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**Performing at the Thyagaraja Aradhana festival at Tiruvaiyaru, with T.N. Krishnan on the violin and Palani Subrahmanya Pillai on the mridangam.**

In those days Carnatic music was nurtured by the nadaswaram tradition. The raga in Carnatic music developed only because of this wind instrument. The nadaswaram's effect is like the spray of rosewater - mild, serene, cool and pleasant. Nadaswara vidwans were



employed by temples (*madathu vidwans*).

Among the nadaswaram maestros were Mannargudi Chinnapakkiri, Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Pillai, Sarangapani Pillai, and the Keeranur Brothers, the Thiruppamburam Brothers and the Tiruvizhimizhalai Brothers. They would walk along the four streets around the temple playing the nadaswaram as the deity was taken around in procession. Now and then they would stop and elaborate a raga at leisure. Every day there was a recital by a great exponent. I would attend all the nadaswaram concerts. With their ornaments, the vidwans would look divine and play extraordinary music. People would throng the temple as much to listen to their music as to worship.

**With disciple V.R. Krishnan in 1963, the year Semmangudi returned to Chennai from Thiruvananthapuram.**

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rajarathnam Pillai was well known for his "nadu bari nayanam" (a medium-sized instrument with a pleasant timbre), which was Bhajanai Ponnuswamy's creation. The nadu bari nayanam was used by the Keeranur Brothers, who played the Mohana raga superbly. In the chill of the evening, with just a towel covering their torso, the vidwans walked for hours along the four streets before reaching the temple. I am sure it was very tiring for them.



That is why some of them habitually imbibed alcohol after concerts. Unfortunately, for some of them it became more than a habit. For instance, Madurai Pushpavanam, who had an excellent voice. But this never affected their music, only their health.

I have listened to all the great vidwans play on the nadaswaram. It was a great learning experience. I enjoyed it immensely and it had a big impact on me.

I can never forget some artists whose music I still cherish. For instance, Tiruvarur Natesan's Kamboji raga, Chidambaram Vaidyanatha Iyer's Varali and Bhairavi, the Keeranur Brothers' Thodi and Rajarathnam Pillai's morning ragas - Saveri, Bilahari, Dhanyasi, Sriragam and Natakurinji. Rajarathnam Pillai learnt music from my uncle, Krishna Iyer. So he had a soft corner for me and used to encourage me a lot. His Thodi is, of course, legendary.

**R.K.:** *Can you tell us about the music and dedication of those masters?*

They were all very dedicated to music, which was central to their lives. It came from their hearts. So there was depth in their music. I have heard it said that Govindaswamy Pillai would not let anything distract him while he played the violin: he would even stop the pendulum of the clock so as not to be distracted by its ticking. Sakharama Rao, for instance, used to practise in the morning and evening. Apart from playing the gotuvadyam, he was a vocalist. Listening to Sakharama Rao on the gotuvadyam and his brother Hari Rao on the violin was a treat to music lovers. Their dedication and depth was reflected in their music and drew large crowds. I can never forget their music. It is as if I have heard them play just now.

**R.K.:** *So, violin accompaniment to the gotuvadyam goes back a long way...*

Yes. The two instruments together sound very, very melodious.

**R.K.:** *And they inspired you a lot.*

It was around this time that an important event happened. My *guru* Sakharama Rao and I were with Tiruvarur Ramachandra Iyer, another stalwart. On one occasion he sang "*Chanitodi teve o manasa*" and asked Sakharama Rao to identify the raga. Sakharama Rao said that it was Kamach (pronounced Kamas). But Ramachandra Iyer said, "No, it is Harikamboji." I mustered up courage and said, "No, it is indeed Kamach." I sang the song again, delineated the *arohanam* and *avarohanam*, and also explained that Kamboji and Kamach belonged to the same group of ragas. Ramachandra Iyer was pleased. He inquired about me and said that I would be a great musician. I was on cloud nine for weeks.

After that, Sakharama Rao fell ill, so I went to Kumbakonam to my cousin, Narayanaswamy Iyer. He used to sing very well and taught me patiently. Morning classes would begin at 7.30 and continue till after 10.30 a.m. Then, again, in the evening there would be another session for three hours. He made me work very hard. I learnt a lot of *varnams* and *keerthanais*. I was encouraged to sing more compositions than *alapanas*.

**R.K.:** *Why was the emphasis on compositions and not on alapanas?*

Singing *alapanas* restricts us to our own creative abilities and consequently the execution is also limited. But when we sing the songs of great masters our mind is exposed to their vision and interpretation of the ragas, and our creation and voice range are enhanced tremendously.

**R.K.:** *Can you remember any memorable events around this time?*

I used to accompany my brother to his concerts. On one such occasion we went to a village in Salem district for a marriage concert. On the second day there was a gotuvadyam concert by Budalur Krishnamurthy Sastrigal and on the first and third days, vocal recitals by Dhakshinamurti Pillai, for which my brother was to play the violin. There, Dhakshinamurti Pillai asked me to sing. I was thrilled and gave of my best. After I finished, he told my brother, "His voice is as melodious as the noise created when a coconut shell is scraped on a rock. Don't bother to give him vocal training. Let him learn to play the violin." I was very upset and decided to prove my vocal skills. I practised like one possessed.

Every day I used to sing for over eight hours. With hindsight, it appears that I should not have practised so hard. It was a great strain on my vocal chords. In fact, it is not good to practise so much.

Then my tonsils had to be removed. That affected my voice further. I was very upset. Rajaji once asked me to use snuff powder, which he said would irritate the throat and improve the voice. Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, whose ardent fan I am,

also used snuff. So, I used snuff regularly after that. It did help. But it led to other problems such as asthma and eosinophilia. So I stopped. I still use it occasionally, though.

**R.K.:** *Do you remember your first concert?*

I went on to train under Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer. I gave my first concert at the Nageswaran temple in Kumbakonam when I was 19. It was at the behest of Azhahanambi Pillai, the mridangam maestro, who sought my guru's permission for me to sing. It was raining heavily that day and the audience had no option but to stay put. So I had a huge audience all through the concert. Thereafter I gave many concerts.

A big break came in 1927 when I was asked to sing at the Madras session of the Indian National Congress. All big vidwans, such as Kancheepuram Naina Pillai and my brother Narayanaswamy, were invited to give concerts. I was given one hour and so was Madurai Mani, who, although he was four years younger to me, was acknowledged as a more senior musician. This concert was a turning point for me. Thereafter I was invited to give many concerts in Madras (Chennai). Not my fault. I was also a genius like you (smiles and points to Ravikiran).

Soon enough I was drawn into the big league. I started coming to Madras almost every week from Kumbakonam. I got a Kumbakonam-Madras railway pass for Rs.6.25. I used to be paid Rs. 25-30 for a concert. I spent a maximum of Rs.15 and saved the rest. Though I never fixed rates, with an increase in the number of concerts my rate also increased. The first big break came when the Rasika Ranjani Sabha (in Madras) paid me Rs.125.

I was soon in the exalted group of Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Rajarathnam Pillai, Rajamanikkam Pillai, Musiri Subramanya Iyer and so on. I also became a big draw. I was drawn to the independence movement and started singing Bharathiar's patriotic songs. I became very popular. From then on there was no looking back.

**R.K.:** *Can you recall some memorable events of this period?*

In 1928, Govindaswamy Pillai took me to Tiruvaiyaru (in Thanjavur district), where all great musicians gather in January for the Thyagaraja Aradhana, to sing at the *samadhi* of the saint-priest Thyagaraja. It was a great honour to sing there. I sang a song in Bhairavi that made everyone sit up and listen. Govindaswamy Pillai, who was seated far away, came up, put his arm around my shoulder, praised me and told me that I would make it really big in a couple of years. I was thrilled.

The other big event in my life was when I went to the Gokhale Sastri Hall in Madras to hear Viswanatha Iyer sing. Govindaswamy Pillai was to play the violin and Dhakshinamurti Pillai, the kanjira. That was a solar eclipse day. There was a huge crowd. But Viswanatha Iyer could not sing, and so the organisers asked me to. I consider that another turning point in my life. Maharani Sethu Parvati Bai of Travancore was at the concert. Impressed with my concert, she asked me to come to Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) to edit and popularise the compositions of Swati Tirunal. I was in a dilemma as it was only around that time that I had started to earn some money. But I promised to think it over. I consulted the Kanchi Sankaracharya who was then camping at Kumbakonam. He advised me to go to Trivandrum to help publish and popularise

Swati Tirunal's compositions. So, I took up the offer and set forth to Trivandrum and remained there for the next two decades or so.

I gave many concerts at the palace. The queen did not want any musical accompaniments, not even the tambura. She only wanted to know my musical thoughts. The queen was herself well versed in music. She was (Veena) Dhanammal's student. I liked to sing for her.

Everything went off well till one day Harikeshanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar, who was then the Principal of the Swati Tirunal Music College and who was the first person to receive a doctorate in music from Travancore University, found fault with my Suruti raga in front of a large gathering. I was hurt but did not react immediately. Later I proved him wrong; it unfortunately led to his early retirement from there. I tried my best to avert it, but could only manage to make it honourable for him. He was not only a great artist but also a great patron of the arts.

**R.K.:** *You took his place as the Principal.*

In 1940, when Muthiah Bhagavathar retired, the queen asked me to take his place. I refused. I thought that administering the college would be difficult. But the royalty persuaded me and told me that it was enough if I merely lent my name as they needed an outstanding personality for the post. I was told that there were able administrators to take care of the day-to-day running of the college. I accepted the offer and remained there for the next 23 years as the Principal (but for a break of three years in between).

**R.K.:** *As Principal of a music college, how did you promote music there?*

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



### **The Master in his musical world.**

I brought many great musicians to Trivandrum - some to give concerts, many to stay there for a couple of months and many more to teach. The queen also encouraged me to invite many great musicians, enabling me to learn. Among the notable ones to come there were veena vidwan Sambasiva Iyer (one of the Karaikudi Brothers) and Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. Sometimes I sang along with Ariyakudi for the queen. It was a great experience to be able to sing with such an inspiring senior artist. I felt honoured. We used to trade *swaras*. There was no competition between us. In fact, he made me sing better than when I sang alone. Once, the queen asked us to sing *kalpana swarams* in Devagandhari. Ariyakudi asked me to do it alone. Despite my misgivings, I sang and he said that it was so beautiful that he was sure he would not be able to hear anyone else sing the Devagandhari *swarams* as nicely. I was thrilled to bits.

I also invited M.S. Subbulakshmi, T. Brinda and T. Mukta to the college. I learnt many pieces from Brinda and we had hours of musical sessions with the queen. The Bhairavi that M.S. sang for the queen still rings in my ears. This way I did my best to spread music in Kerala. Someone even commented that the Cauvery had come to Kerala.

Some, like K.S. Narayanaswamy, K.R. Kumaraswamy Iyer, C.S. Krishna Iyer, M.G. Seetharama Iyer and Hariharan, came to the college to teach. It was an excellent team. Normally they used to teach for one hour a class of 20-30. I used to teach the higher classes. I felt that one hour was inadequate for the higher classes. So I used to teach for three hours at a stretch. Only then was it possible to give individual attention. We started branches in Tripunithura (near Kochi) and Palghat (Palakkad). C.S. Krishna Iyer, Kumaraswamy and some others were sent to take care of these branches.

But much to my dislike there was a lot of interference from politicians. However, I was strict and went by the rules. For instance, on one occasion the Kerala Chief Minister recommended a boy to the college. I did not find him good enough, so I refused him admission. But there was much pressure, and I finally had to take him, but only on the basis of a letter from the Chief Secretary, which amounts to an order. That was my way of registering my protest.

**R.K.:** *Why was there a three-year break in your stint in Trivandrum?*

Around that time, at the behest of the Government of India, the Chief Secretary asked me to be the Chief Producer of Carnatic music at All India Radio, Delhi. I hesitated, but they persuaded me to be with AIR, Madras. I finally accepted the offer and was with AIR from 1957 to 1960 and did my best. Once my term was over they wanted me to continue, but I refused because I could not listen to the *apaswarams* during the auditions (smiles).

Then I came back to Trivandrum. In 1963, I requested the Chief Minister to relieve me from the post of Principal as I was 55. He refused, saying that I had helped popularise music in Kerala and I should continue with the good work. But I became restless. I asked GNB (G.N. Balasubra-maniam) if he would take my position in the college. He agreed. And with that proposal I went back to the Chief Minister (who had changed by then). He agreed, and in November 1963 I came to Madras.

**R.K.:** *What was your contribution to reviving Swati Tirunal kritis?*

**During the music Season in Chennai in December 1989, Semmangudi with M.S. Subbulakshmi, her husband T. Sadasivam, shehnai artist Ustad Bismillah Khan and Hindustani classical singer Pandit Bhimsen Joshi.**

One of the most significant things I did in Trivandrum was to polish the Swati Tirunal *kritis* and edit them for publication; 200-300 *kritis* were revived in their original tunes. Harikeshanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar went to each house, recorded the songs, and tuned some of them. He had done an excellent job. I merely polished them. My main contribution was to make many of them concert-worthy. Some "Singapore ragas", such as Charukesi and Shanmugapriya, were not much preferred as compared to the solid Carnatic ragas such as Thodi and Kalyani. But there are some songs of the Maharaja in those ragas too.

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**R.K.:** *Which are the songs you tuned?*

Only a few. I completely tuned Kalyani, Neelambari and some two or three other songs.

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**Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar in concert. Of the senior artist, Semmangudi says: "I was greatly influenced by Ramanuja Iyengar. I do not want another life. But if there is one, I want to be able to sing like him."**

**R.K.:** *Who tuned Vishweshwara in Sindhubhairavi?*

I did.

**R.K.:** *Who tuned Jalajabandhu (Suruti), Tharuninyan (Durjavanti) and a few such padams?*

K.S. Narayanaswamy, the veena vidwan. He also tuned Kintuseivu in Kalyani.

**A.K.:** *What is the difference between the older generation of musicians and the current crop?*

*Vaidheegam* (orthodoxy). The older generation of musicians were very orthodox, and their singing touched people's hearts. Some of them may not have laid much emphasis on the *sahitya* and may have even mispronounced a word or two, but they had substance, weight and depth of music.

**R.K.:** *You are known for your analytical skills...*

I am generally very analytical. I have spent many hours over many years thinking, analysing and practising.

In our times compositions were discovered every day. The lesser-known *kritis* of the great masters were discovered and polished. Each day brought to light a new composer. The old endures because it is soaked in *ragabhava*.

Today's crop of youngsters are very intelligent and meticulous about many things. But they are yet to get the depth, weight and the life of our generation.

**Semmangudi performs at the Thyaga Brahma Sabha in December 1997, with M. Balamuralikrishna on the viola.**

K. PICHUMANI



**A.K.:** *Why is this so?*

Largely because music is now spread very wide and, therefore, very thin. Also because

music in those days was learnt directly as an oral tradition from *guru* to *sisya*, where the *sisya* stayed in the guru's house and learnt as much as he could from the *guru*. It fostered an all-round training - when the *guru* sang, when he composed a new song and interacted with other musicians. That enrichment is denied to our youth in this mechanical age.



Also, today's youth do not have role models the way we had in those days. For example, one could listen to Ramanuja Iyengar sing for hours. He not only gave us the concert format that we follow now, but also popularised many ragas and a variety of *kritis*. Listening to his rendering of ragas and *swaras*, one would think that he had memorised them all. It would be so precise and perfect. His presentation was excellent. Even his *guru* Poochi Iyengar could not match Ramanuja Iyengar's presentation, I am told.

Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer was like an electric current. His music would touch everyone's soul. It was divine and addictive. My uncle Krishna Iyer was a great musician. M.D. Ramanathan had an excellent voice (*saareeram*) with a lot of depth. I still remember his Yadukulakambodi in Trivandrum. Sabesa Iyer and Tiger Varadachariar were doyens. Palghat Mani Iyer was undoubtedly a genius on the mridangam. Palani Subramaniam Pillai was also very good. Keeranur Chinnathambi was an outstanding musician. Karaikudi Subbarama Iyer was an eminent veena exponent. Dhakshinamurti Pillai was extraordinary. He was one of those who gave me a lift. To quote Palghat Mani Iyer, "With his passing, the Carnatic music world seems like a brigade without a commander." I was greatly influenced by Ramanuja Iyengar. I do not want another life. But if there is one, I want to be able to sing like Ramanuja Iyengar.

The young artists should listen to these great musicians as much as possible. It will certainly inspire them and will help instil some life into their music.

**A.K.:** *There has been a proliferation of music concerts in recent times. Does it have any impact on the musicians and the audience?*

In those days there were only a handful of sabhas in Madras - in Egmore, Triplicane and Mylapore. I, for instance, used to give only five or six concerts a month. Once I gave 22 performances in a month, but that was very rare. Today, there is a proliferation of music. It is in a way good for musicians. They gain greater exposure and visibility. But such easy accessibility and over-exposure has desensitised the audience. In the past you had to seek music and savour it. So every concert was an unforgettable experience.

The audience then had patience and discipline. They used to listen with rapt attention to concerts even if they extended to over four hours. If anyone was found talking, he would be literally thrown out. Artists also commanded that kind of respect. Sakharama Rao and Dhakshinamurti Pillai have been known to walk out from concerts if they were disturbed by the audience. Similar were the attitudes of stalwarts such as Tiger Varadachariar and my uncle, Krishna Iyer. They could not tolerate disrespect to the art. Today's performers not only tolerate indiscipline, they also rely more on fast and virtuosic music which do not permit much depth. Youngsters now render *swara*-based ragas. *Swara* should merge with raga. It should not be the basis on which you sing a raga.

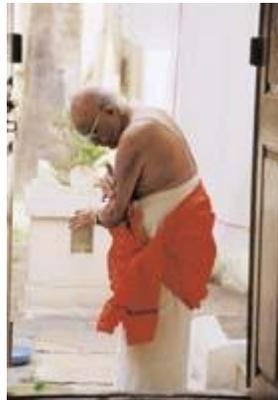
This is because people come to concerts today not the way they would go to a temple, as it was in the past, but as they would go to the theatre - for entertainment. Our artists are compelled to please them. Many in the audience keep discussing politics and "pattu" (silk) saris. That should not be tolerated.

The other regrettable modern practice is the audience bursting into applause in the middle of a song. This creates an illusion that the success of a concert is to be gauged by the volume and frequency of applause. I think we should have a thumb rule that there should be no clapping in the middle of a song. Many artists go on a *swara* race, taking them to a pitch, as if to imitate drumbeats, to get an applause.

A welcome change in modern times is the emergence of women performers. In those days, with the exception of the Dhanammal family, women musicians sang a string of songs exactly as they were taught. They did not attempt much improvisation of raga and *swara*. With the natural advantage of a sweet voice, women are now doing as well as men in ragam, thanam and pallavi. Dhanammal is known as a great veena player, but few know that she was also a great vocalist. Brinda and Mukta of the Dhanammal school were great musicians. No one can match them in *gamaka* (oscillation) and *azhutham* (weight). Brinda was even better than Dhanammal. She was excellent in rendering *padams*. I think she personified the essence of Carnatic music. With Brinda's passing ended a great saga in Carnatic music.

**R.K.:** *In your times there were no microphones. How did you manage?*

S. THANTHONI



Microphones were introduced in the 1940s. It ushered in a revolution. The singer no longer had to develop full-throated resonance. Before the 1930s we used to sing without mikes and fans. The auditorium would be full. Amplification would be achieved by tonal clarity, depth, weight and vocal power. The mridangam is a victim too. Restraint robs music of natural force and lucidity. It can be pleasing to the ear, but cannot haunt the mind.

**R.K.:** *What is your advice to youngsters and to make Carnatic music enduring?*

Some people have advocated learning music by standing neck-deep in cold water and so on. All that is nonsense. My advice to youngsters, especially male vocalists, is that you should come out and sing only after your voice matures. These days young children are brought to the stage even before their voice breaks. It may be nice to hear children sing, but it is best to wait till the voice matures.

There is today a lack of devotion. Musicians should be charged with devotion. There should be *bhakti* towards music. That would liven music and ensure that it endures.

**R.K.:** *What is the secret of your success?*

*He does not answer this question, but opens his puja (prayer) box and reveals its contents.*

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