

# Musiri's 'Man Friday' keeps Tyagaraja's kritis alive

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THE long and colourful history of Indian music produced many outstanding vocalists who achieved legendary fame and are still being remembered by later generations. Music lovers speak about Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer or Madurai Pushpavaram whom they have never seen or heard. Most of these doyens concentrated on presenting concerts and had little interest in theory or editing work. It is rarely that one comes across a vocalist in great demand engaging himself in academic activities like composing music for old compositions and editing works of archival value.

Vidwan T K Govinda Rao, the self-effacing and publicity-shy musician, was born in 1929 in a family of musicians at Tripunithura near Kochi. His initial lessons were from a cousin and he was in the first batch of students at the Central College of Music, Madras, (1949) then under principal Musiri Subrahmanya Iyer known as the 'monarch of bhava sangita'. He later did gurukulavasa under the same doyen and thus had the advantage of both collegiate education and the gurukula method. Musiri's bhava-laden rendering of raga alapana, kritis, neraval and kalpana swaras is still remembered by discerning rasikas of the older generation. Govinda Rao not only inherited his unique style but also,

during his long innings as a vocalist, added many more nuances to enrich the 'Musiri style'. He was Musiri's 'Man Friday' for 15 years, his total

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period of association with his Guru being 27 years.

A polyglot knowing English, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Sanskrit and Hindi, and with scholarly instincts, Govinda Rao still burns the midnight oil and produces works of lasting value. Besides numerous publications, he composes music for songs of Parandara Dasa and others, which have no authentic tunes.

Many songs like 'Venkatachala Nilayam' (Sindhuharjavi', which sway audiences today, are his re-creations from the earlier melodies.

His late night industry has yielded works like 'Vara Manjari', 'Kshetra Kritis of Tyagaraja' and 'Ghana raga panchakam' which are a bonanza to the music world. It is amazing that with this marathon schedule, he managed to learn several instruments like the vina, violin, mridangam and kanjira.

Govinda Rao's most productive years were those spent as producer of music at Madras AIR for three years and as Chief Producer at Delhi for seven years. With titanic energy and drive, he produced musical features, operas, documentaries, music appreciation programmes and what have you.

After his retirement in 1990, he is more busy than while in service and his magnum opus is his edition of 688 kritis of Tyagaraja meant for national and international consumption.

As a devotee of Tyagaraja, it has long been Govinda Rao's cherished ambition to produce an edition of the saint's kritis which can meet both national and international needs. The earlier editions suffered from limitations of scripts and the language into which the songs were translated.

The first and most reliable edition of Tyagaraja was published in the Telugu script in 1908 by Tillaisthanam Narasimha Bhagavata who was in the direct line of disciples. A Tamil script edition of 400 kritis was published in 1910 by Ramanada Yogi (S.A.

Ramaswami Iyer) of the Wala-japet lineage.

In 1922, K.V. Sriatvasa Iyengar rendered yeoman ser-

vice to music by publishing all that he could lay his hands on in Tyagaraja lore. In 1948, the Andhra Gana Kala Parishat of Rajahmundry published the first Telugu commentary of Tyagaraja kritis by

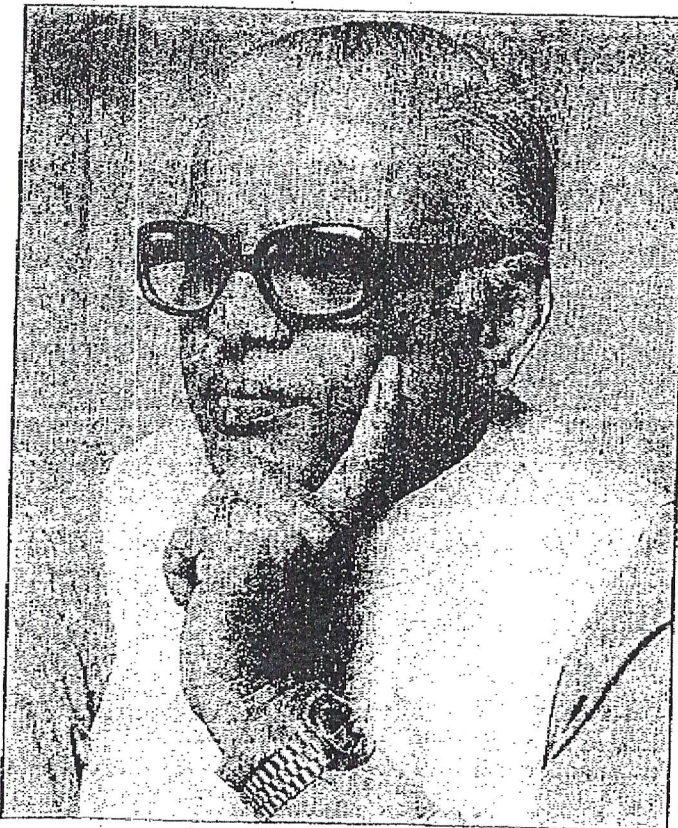
the eminent Vedanta Vidwan Kalluri Virabhadra Sastri. Ten years later, the Ramakrishna Math published

music plays to his credit and his compositions are eminently worth conning from the literary point of view, not to mention their value as devotional masterpieces. Recent publications in English and Telugu have highlighted the 'kavitvam' of Tyagaraja. But a comprehensive volume in the Devanagari and Rome scripts with meaning in English was in great demand and it was left to Govinda Rao to fulfil the need.

The elegantly printed volume of nearly 900 pages contains the texts of 688 kritis in Devanagari script with transliteration in Roman script and an eminently crisp English translation. Several editions appear to have been consulted and different readings have been noted below each kriti.

Thus the book is the most definitive edition of Tyagaraja kritis besides containing the largest number of songs published so far. Govinda Rao has placed the world of scholarship in his debt by this magnificent effort.

Such an expensive publication would not have been possible but for a liberal donation of rupees one lakh from the Muktbambaram Trust by Bombay Sisters, Saroja and Lalitha, principal disciples of Govinda Rao. The book is a bargain for Rs. 250 because an overseas publication of a similar nature would cost at least ten times as much. The publishers are Ganamandir Publications, Indira Nagar, Madras-600 020.



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a Devanagari edition with an English translation. A Tamil edition of 675 kritis with meaning was published by the present writer in 1967.

Among the Trinity, Tyagaraja was the only poet with too