



Music Manjari - Malar 6

A newsletter from SRGMPDN- your Forum for Carnatic Music!

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A Tribute to the Legend – Sri. T.K.Govinda Rao

- Written by his daughter and disciple Smt.Padmaja Kishore

(SRGMPDN is grateful to the author of this article and proud to publish this for our Rasikas)

My father Sri TK Govinda Rao grew up in Tripunitura , Kerala, and he belonged to Tulu speaking Udipi community. His interest in music grew from childhood when he listened to his sisters singing Carnatic music. At the age of eleven, he participated in Chithirai Thirunal Festival at Trivendram and won the gold medal which in turn gave him the opportunity to sing for Trivandram Broadcasting Corporation. Later he studied in Sanskrit college in Tripunithura. He studied music for a brief period from his uncle Sri Mani Bhagavathar in Coimbatore and then he came to Chennai and started learning from Sri Thiruppampuram Swaminatha Pillai. He later joined Central College of Carnatic Music where Sri Musiri Subramanyam Iyer was the Principal, who recognized my father's talents and took him as his disciple. He underwent Gurukulavasa for fifteen years under Musiri.

Since I was four years old, my father exposed me to music by encouraging me to attend all his music classes and his concerts. He used to tell me that music should be our breath in life and when I was six, he enrolled me in Kalakshetra where they emphasized the importance of music. He was very strict when it came to music and I was afraid to listen to film songs when he was around. When he was teaching at home, all four of his children would maintain silence and his students used to wonder how children of such small age could be that quiet. During my summer holidays, he used to take me on his scooter to his music classes and on the way back he used to take me to Musiri's house sometimes. When I was ten, my father once asked me to sing Thiruppavai in Varali ragam in front of Musiri and after listening, Musiri told my father to make me listen to a lot of music and that I would learn just by listening.

For him, nadayoga was his way of life. He used to adore compositions of Sri Tyagaraja and Sri Purandaradasa. The rhyming beauty, simplicity and deep spiritual philosophy of Purandaradasa had great impact on him and he tuned many of Purandaradasa compositions such as "Baro Krishnaya", "Venkatachala Nilayam", "Innu Dayabarade", etc. which have been popularized by Bombay Sisters and Late ML Vasantha Kumari. He also tuned Periasamy Thooran's compositions such as "Muruga Muruga" in Saveri, "Taye Tripura Sundari" in Suddha Saveri which were sung by many musicians.

He was emphasizing that one should sing with 'ragabhava' and not with swaras in mind. He used to quote Sri Tyagaraja's "Nadasudharasam bilanu" composition in Arabhi which describes that raga is like the khodanda (bow) of Rama and swaras are just the bell hung at the corner of the bow for decoration. He was also saying that we need to have "sahaja bhakthi" while singing and used to quote phrases such as "suddhamaina manasuche" in the composition "kaddanu variki" in Thodi, "sahajabhakthitho ragajnanamu" in the composition "Swararagasudharasa" in Shankarabharanam.

After retiring as Chief Producer of AIR at the age of 60, he came to visit me in California and was thrilled to learn how he could use the computer himself to publish the books on various composers with notation and meaning. In a short period of time he became an expert in Adobe Pagemaker and in the span of 15 years, he published the books on Trinity, Swathi Thirunal and Varna Sagaram. The Compositions of Sri Purandaradasa that contains more than 1000 compositions is almost complete and we are planning to publish it this year with the help of his students.

Upcoming Events and Concerts:

Jan 28th: SRGMPDM Chamber Concert
by Chi. Gokul Chandramouli.

Mar 3rd: Frederick Thyagaraja
Aradhana @ Urbana Elementray
School

Mar 4th: Sangeethalahari @GMU

With lots of inputs from other students of my father, an article was published in "The Hindu" by Smt. Uma Krishnaswamy and I am quoting some of the highlights below.

The amount of effort that went into each song, for embellishment was incredible. He had his pulse on the composer's feelings and hence the rendering demanded delicate and sophisticated handling. The meaning of the lyrics was brought out with careful pronunciation of the words laying stress on the right syllables.

He was a genius in niraval and swaram singing and that it requires understanding to really appreciate the uniqueness of this 'bani.' They always varied according to the mood and style of the song, for instance 'Bhavanutha' and 'Mohanarama' both in Mohanam. He never repeated any phrase in either. He had his own, very logical, commas, semicolons and full stops for swara singing so much so that, be it in a class or a concert, he would halt, after a misplaced full stop or if the *porutham* was disrupted and he used to comment "*morunchadam pottachu!*" Strict adherence to grammar and any deviation was handled with sophistication.

He strictly followed the Musiri bani of choosing the right line of sahityam for delineation keeping in mind the meaning, and not once sacrificing the hrasva/deerga of the words. This was evident in songs with several "charanams," such as the Divya Nama Kritis where careful treatment was given according to the words. He was so creative and imaginative that to keep pace by executing it in singing was a tough task.

The same can be experienced in the innumerable songs and hymns he has tuned, varnams and tillanas he has composed, and, immortalised by him as well as through MLV, KVN, his own students Saroja and Lalitha and several others. The Dasar namas have been tuned so well that even a person who does not understand Kannada can 'feel' the meaning when he sang them.

Music and Art today have become so commercialised that makes one wonder and reminisce how non-commercial and genuine he was. He would be so completely engrossed in imparting knowledge in the class that he would often be late for the next class or miss his next set of appointments. He insisted that his students understand the meaning of every song, pronounce the lyrics properly, understand a raga and comprehend why that particular raga was chosen for that song. In class, he would give different patterns of swaram for each one without repetition.

Ask for knowledge and he was ever ready and happy to share without holding anything back. He was always enthusiastic to discuss, debate and interact, and was willing to encourage anyone who wanted to learn music.

His home was always open to his students. True to the Udipi tradition, none was allowed to go home without tasting his wife Hema's excellent snacks and tea. He was so humane that he would be the first to reach out if a musician or student needed help.

His books have immortalised him. His monumental project of compiling and editing all the compositions of the Trinity, compositions of Swati Tirunal, and also his Varna Sagaram in diacritical Roman and Devanagari scripts with meaning in English and SRGM notations in Roman scripts help to bridge, not only the language barrier, but also the generation gap, while preserving the essence and identity of the original that remain characteristically and traditionally Indian. A book on Purandara Dasa's compositions was the last of his works to be launched.

"Melody carved in stone is sculpture, sculpture in melody is music. In colours it becomes painting. Sculptured music painted in words is the highest in literature." All those who came into contact with him would agree that this is an apt description of his life.

A Special Chennai Music Season Report from Satya & Bhima Sastry

December in Chennai

Our recent trip to Chennai to attend a wedding in the family was a delightful one. The timing was perfect, mid-December, when all the sabhas vie to bring out the best Carnatic music to rasikas. With the wedding taken care of within a week of our landing, many in the family were ready for a getaway. The sabha of choice most of the time was, of course, The Music Academy. Armed with ragam books, sabha schedules, not to mention the scarves and shawls to face "Chennai's wintry weather", we charged out early mornings and returned late nights for one entire week. Listening to day long music programs, with only interruptions in the form of canteen visits, was a very satisfying experience. Here are some of the memorable programs we attended...