

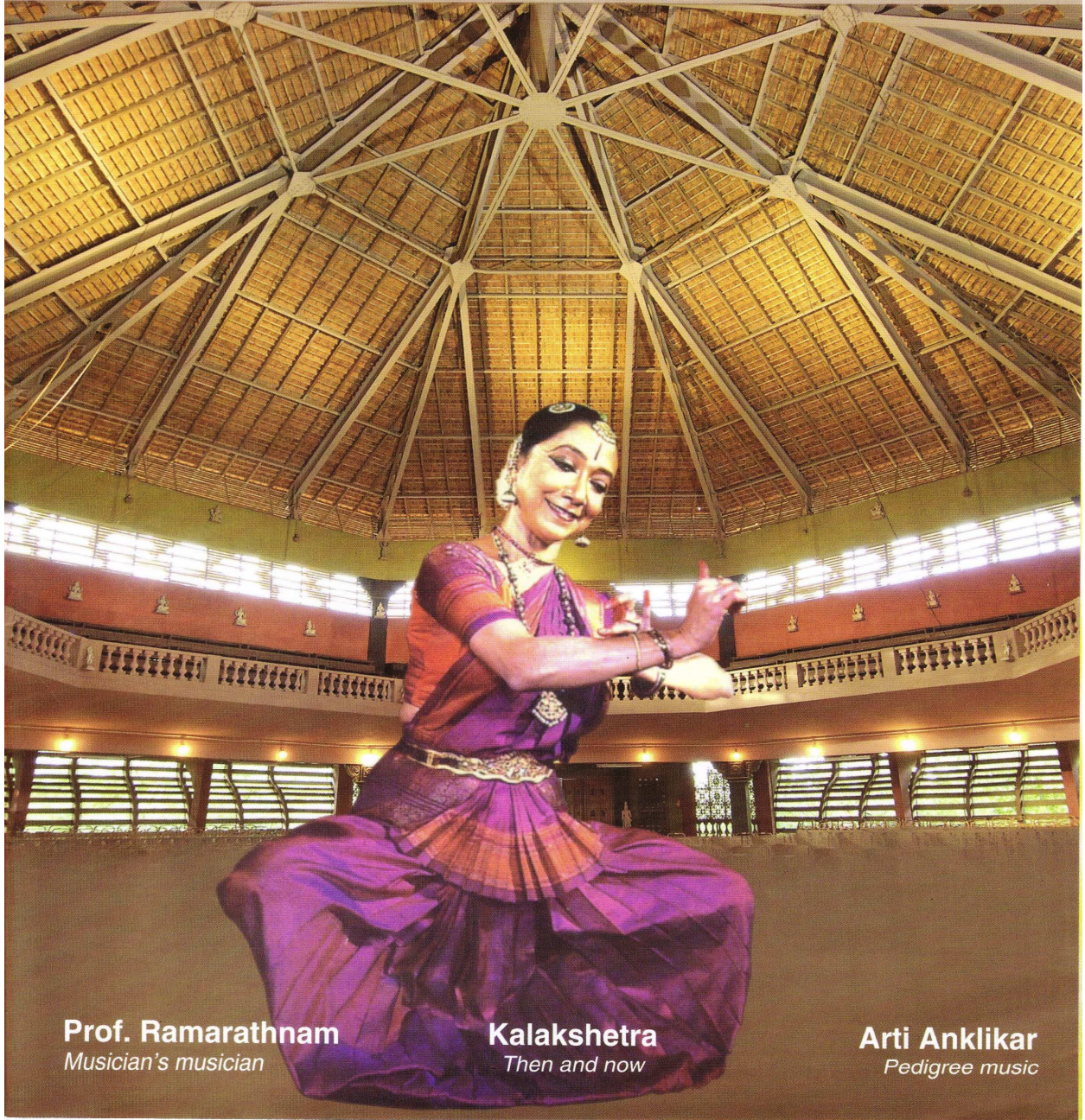
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Silver Jubilee Year



Prof. Ramarathnam
Musician's musician

Kalakshetra
Then and now

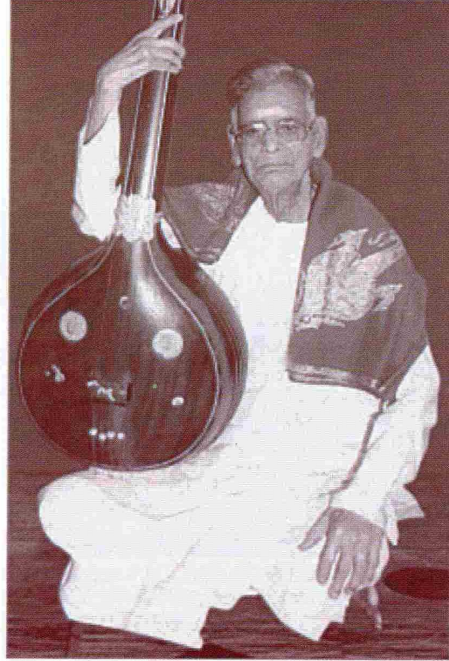
Arti Anklikar
Pedigree music

Prof. Mysore V. Ramarathnam Musician's musician

Prof. Mysore V. Ramarathnam (b. 1917) is a well known Carnatic musician, author, teacher and composer. His 91st birthday and nearly 70 years of contribution to music were celebrated in December 2007. The only vocalist disciple of Mysore T. Chowdiah, Ramarathnam was highly regarded by such stalwarts as Mysore Vasudevacharya, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata, Alathur Srinivasa Iyer and Musiri Subramania Iyer. He occupied centre stage on the concert platform for more than six decades. He was the first Principal of the University College of Music and Dance, University of Mysore, since its inception in 1965, a position which he held till his retirement in 1987. He has trained hundreds of students, guided Ph.D students, authored books on the theoretical and practical aspects of Carnatic music, and composed some scholarly compositions in major raga-s under the mudra "Rama".

Vidwan Ramarathnam who has been hailed as a musician's musician was born at Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh on December 20, 1917 in a family of music lovers and landlords to V. Subbaramiah and Parvatamma. Introduced to music at a young age, Ramarathnam loved to hear his aunt Saradamma sing. He later learnt from her. A self taught person, Saradamma learnt music by keenly observing and listening to the lessons given to her husband Kothandaramiah by the legendary Pallavi Sesa Iyer — son and disciple of Manambuchavadi Venkatasubbiah, a direct disciple of Tyagaraja. Ramarathnam's uncle Kothandaramiah, a businessman and a connoisseur of music, lived in Chennai on Thambu Chetty Street and through his friends, approached the sixty-year old Pallavi Sesa Iyer to stay in his house to teach music. Pallavi Sesa Iyer graciously accepted this invitation and stayed with Kothandaramiah and Saradamma for over three years. During this time, Sesa Iyer taught Kothandaramiah his own compositions along with those of the trinity. Kothandaramiah wanted his guru to publish a book containing about 300 of his compositions that would include varnam-s, kriti-s and tillana-s. He even provided monetary help to the extent of 3000 rupees. Unfortunately, his wish was not to be fulfilled. Saradamma returned to Chittoor after Kothandaramiah's untimely demise in Chennai.

It was at Chittoor that the boy Ramarathnam learnt from his aunt the compositions of Pallavi Sesa Iyer (*Ika nannu brovakunna* – Bhairavi), Tyagaraja kriti-s (*Kalaharanamelara*, *Rama nannu brovara*, etc.), Patnam Subramania Iyer kriti-s (*Inka dayaraleda napai* – Chakravakam), and the tillana-s of Pallavi Sesa Iyer — including a tillana in Dhanyasi composed in praise of the Mysore royalty.



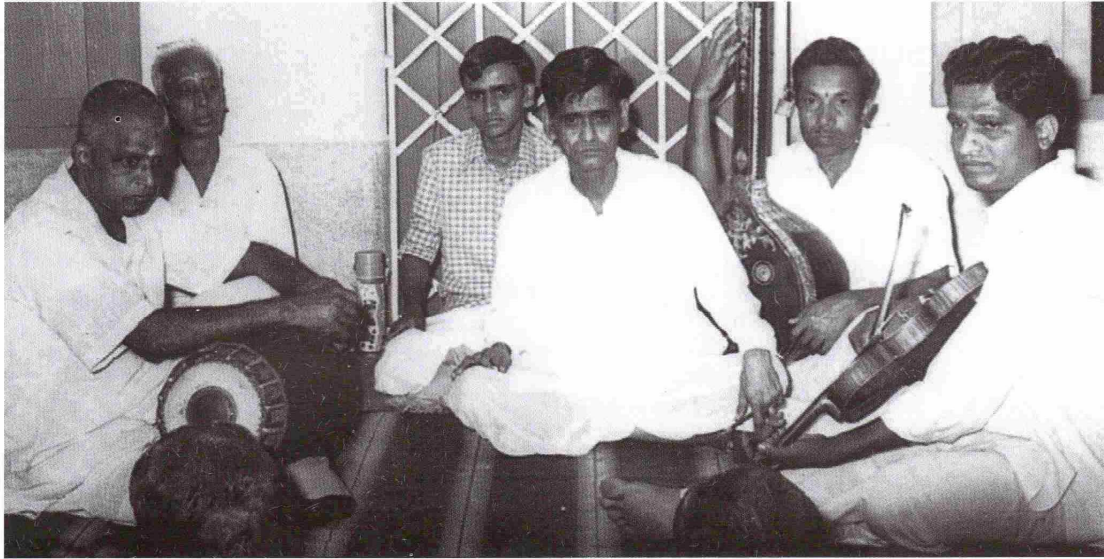
Prof. Ramarathnam

At Chittoor, even as a boy, Ramarathnam's skills in singing were noticed by Nagari Varadachar, a High Court advocate. Ramarathnam and his elder brother did main and supporting roles in puranic dramas featuring songs produced by the Rama Vilas Sabha. It was founded by the cultural elite of Chittoor, made up of highly educated people, members of the judiciary, artists and dramatists alike. Many plays were produced in summer, when the court was not in session. Members of the sabha included personalities like Anantasayanam Iyengar who later became the Governor of Bihar and Chittoor V. Nagiah, who played the harmonium.

Noticing his innate talent in music, well wishers helped Ramarathnam take his first steps in Carnatic music. He started formal training under stalwarts like Ganakalasinghu D. Subbaramiah, followed by Palghat Someswara Bhagavata and L.S. Narayanaswamy Bhagavata, a disciple of Naina Pillai.

Palghat Ayyamani Iyer, a well known mridanga vidwan in Bangalore and a classmate of Palghat Mani Iyer, introduced Ramarathnam

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Ramarathnam in concert with K. Vageesh (vocal support), M. Mahadevappa (violin) and Palghat Mani Iyer (mridanga)

to T. Chowdiah who readily accepted him as a disciple after listening to him sing a few kriti-s. Ramarathnam settled down in Mysore and Chowdiah taught him for nearly ten years, grooming him into a mature vocalist. During this time Ramarathnam came into close contact with Mysore Vasudevacharya, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Musiri Subramania Iyer and Alathur Srinivasa Iyer. From these giants he learnt many kriti-s and pallavi-s. The close

contact, discussions, lessons and influence of their music helped him evolve a style that is a fine blend of classicism and creativity.

Ramarathnam's first concert was in the presence of Chandrasekhara Bharati of the Sringeri Sarada Peetham. His notable concerts include those at the Bidaram Krishnappa Seeta Rama Mandira in Mysore, the Music Academy in Chennai, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in New Delhi, Sangeeta Sahitya Kalakshetra in Mumbai, as

Ramarathnam, M. Chandrasekharan and Vellore Ramabhadran



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well as concerts at Bangalore Gayana Samaja, Aralikatte Ramamandiram festivals, and Bangalore Karnataka Gana Kala Parishat. He has performed extensively over AIR. He has been accompanied by leading artists like Chowdiah, Palghat Mani Iyer, T.N. Krishnan and his brother T.N. Mani, V. Govindaswamy Naickar, Chalakudi Narayanaswamy, M. Chandrasekhar, Sikkil Bhaskaran, T.K. Murthy, Kamalakar Rao, Vellore Ramabhadran, Umayalpuram Sivaraman, and Guruvayur Dorai. He has given vocal concerts in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, San Diego and San Jose in the U.S.A.

In Prof. Ramarathnam's music we find a harmonious blending of raga, bhava, tala of a rich tradition, with brilliant, imaginative swara-s and marvellous niraval.

Prof. Ramarathnam continued to perform solo concerts well in to his eighties. His last concert was a one-hour All India Radio concert recorded and broadcast in the spring of 2004 when he was nearly 87, from AIR-Tiruchi. He was accompanied by renowned vidwans like Ramanujacharyulu (violin), Salem K. Srinivas (mridanga), and Coimbatore V. Mohanam (ghata).

First principal

Prof. Ramarathnam's teaching and administrative career started in Bidaram Krishnappa's Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira, Mysore. His guru T. Chowdiah started the Ayyanar College of Music in the Mandira in 1945 and appointed him as its vice-principal. Ramarathnam served the institution for 20 years as a teacher and administrator.

With the opening of the Mysore University College of Fine Arts in 1965, Prof. Ramarathnam became its first

Disciples

Prof. V. Ramarathnam has trained a large number of students. Neelamma Kadambi was his first disciple. Other distinguished disciples include T.R. Srinivasan, T.M. Madhuranath (also a disciple of T.R. Mahalingam), N. Nanjundaswamy, B.R. Shamachar, K.J. Venkatachar, Katapathoor Krishnamurthy, T.S. Ramaa, G.R. Jaya, Sukanya Prabhakar, Vijaya Murthy, R.N. Srilatha, Nagalakshmi, T.N. Padma, Nagamani Srinath, K. Vageesh, K.G. Kanakalakshmi, Chandrika, P. Rama, Gayathri Satyanarayana, and his own son and daughter V.R. Subramanyam and Uma Prasanna, as well as grand daughters Pallavi Srinivasan and Meghana Srinivasan. Many of them are well known musicians and performing artists of AIR and Doordarshan.

principal, serving it until 1977. During this tenure, he nurtured the growth of the college into a premier institution. There he helped establish bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programmes in music, dance and drama and many students have and continue to benefit from these programmes. He also served many universities including the Venkateswara University, Tirupati, the Banaras Hindu University and Kerala University in various capacities.

He spared no effort to foster the creation of a dynamic environment for the study of the theory and practice of vocal and instrumental music, Bharatanatyam and drama by enabling interactions with leading personalities in the respective fields. The College of Fine Arts was the venue for many concerts, lec-dems, discussions and performances by famous artists.

Professor Emeritus

After retirement in 1977, Ramarathnam served as an emeritus UGC professor for three years from 1977-80 at the University College of Fine Arts. During this period he researched and wrote an authoritative record of the contribution of the Mysore Wodeyars to Carnatic music. The Karnataka Govt. Book Authority later published this research work, in the form of a book titled *Contribution and Patronage of Mysore Wodeyars to Carnatic Music*.

Author and composer

Ramarathnam is also a scholarly composer and author. Motivated by Poet Laureate Kuvempu, and with literary help from Jnanapeeth awardee P.T. Narasimhachar and musicologist Rallapalli Anantakrishna Sarma, he has composed over 25 scholarly compositions in well known raga-s in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada under the signature "Rama" and has published them with chittaswara and notations, along with other rare kriti-s dear to him. These compositions have been published in the *Karnataka Sangeeta Kritirachana Sangraha* Vol. 1, published by Prof. V. Ramarathnam, 1992 and *Keertana Tarangini*, published by D.V.K. Murthy, Mysore, 2000.

To commemorate his 90th birthday festivities Muktidananda Swamiji of Rama Krishna Ashram, Mysore, released the book *Reminiscences of a Musician* by Prof. Ramarathnam. The book offers glimpses into the vidwans who nurtured Ramarathnam, and the unique journey he has travelled over seven decades, in the challenging landscape of Carnatic music. The book contains all his compositions with detailed notations. It was released in Mysore, Chennai and Cleveland, during 2006-07.

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Awards and Honours

Prof. Mysore V. Ramarathnam has been honoured by many personalities and institutions. Noted among them are:

Chandrasekhara Bharati, Sringeri

Karnataka Kalatilaka, Sangeeta Nritya Academy, Karnataka

Sangeeta Kala Ratna, Bangalore Gayana Samaja

Sangeeta Ratna Mysore T. Chowdiah Centenary Memorial Award

Swaramurthy V.N. Rao Memorial Award

Sangeeta Kala Sagaram, Bhairavi Fine Arts & Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana Committee

Kanaka Purandara Award from Govt. of Karnataka (2007). Prof. Ramarathnam donated the award purse of one lakh rupees to the restoration of the Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira.

Books published

Carnataka Sangeeta Sudha - co-author Dr. V.S. Sampath Kumaracharya (1967), *Sangeeta Darpana* (1969), *Naukacharithram* - co-author R.N. Doraiswamy (1969), *Pallaki Seva Prabandham* - co-author M.V. Rathna (1974), *Sangeeta Ratna T. Chowdiah's Compositions* (1975), *Sangeeta Sastra Parichaya* Vols. 1 and 2 - co-author R.N. Doraiswamy, *Carnataka Sangeeta Kritirachana Sangraha* Vol. 1 (1992), *Carnataka Sangeetadha Lakshya Lakshana Sangraha*, *Mysore Sadasivarayaru* (1997), *Carnataka Sangeeta Deepeke* - co-author Dr. V.S. Sampathkumaracharya (2000), *Keertana Tarangini* (2000), *Contribution and Patronage of Mysore Wodeyars to Carnatic Music*, *Apoorva Vaggeya Kritimanjari* (2004), *Muthuswami Dikshitar Navagraha Kritigalu* (2004), *Muthuswami Dikshitar Navavarana Kritigalu* (2004), *A Musician's Reminiscences* (released on December 24th 2006 during his 90th birthday celebrations, later released worldwide at Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana festival in 2007), *Apoorva Vaggeya Kritimanjari* Vol. 2 (released on his 91st birthday at the Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira, Mysore (2007).

Prof. V. Ramarathnam has authored over fifteen books, some of them in collaboration with his musicologist friend Dr. Sampath Kumaracharya, Prof. M.V. Rathna and Prof. R.N. Doraiswamy. These books deal with the theory and practical aspects of Carnatic music. Ten of them were published by the University Press,

University of Mysore and have been reprinted several times. D.V.K. Murthy, a famous publisher in Mysore has also published six books authored by Prof. V. Ramarathnam.

Based on a Kannada article by
Prof. SAMPATH KUMARACHARYA

Ravikiran interviews Ramarathnam

Excerpts from an interview by Chitraveena N. RAVIKIRAN of Prof. Mysore V. RAMARATHNAM on his 91st birthday in December 2007, at the Prasanna Seeta Rama Mandira, Mysore.

Ravikiran: *How did you get into music? Can you please tell us something about your childhood and your gurukulam?*

Prof. Ramarathnam: For the first 14 years of my life I was in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh. Ill health forced me to move to Bangalore where I had many relatives, for medical treatment. After a few years I moved back to Chittoor, but the climate there did not suit my health and I had to return to Bangalore after sometime. My close relative Harapanahalli Rama Rao (head of National College, Bangalore) was impressed with my musical skills. He introduced me to his friend Ganakala Sindhu D. Subbaramiah and L.S. Narayanaswamy Bhagavatar (disciple of the great Naina Pillai). I had my early training under them.



With Ravikiran

I appeared for the very first senior music exam conducted by the Karnataka government. My guru Subbaramiah and Thayappa, a violinist who had accompanied famous artists of his generation, were my examiners. They were very impressed with my performance, and I

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passed my senior exam in music in Bangalore. During this time I also came into contact with mridanga vidwan Palghat Ayyamani Iyer, a colleague of Palghat T.S. Mani Iyer. Both of them had been disciples of Palghat Subba Iyer. Ayyamani Iyer advised me to further my musical knowledge under Mysore T. Chowdiah. He also advised me that as Chowdiah was in contact with all the legends of his generation, I should listen and interact with them to grow in music. So after learning from D. Subbaramiah, Narayanaswamy Bhagavatar and Palghat Someswara Bhagavatar, for eight to ten years and listening to their music, I had imbibed significant knowledge from them. I continued my training in music under Chowdiah, from 1937 to 1947.

When did you actually come to Mysore?

I came to Mysore in 1937 and have stayed here ever since.

Can you recall your first music performance?

My first music performance was in 1940 in Bangalore, on the occasion of the consecration of the Sarada Devi temple at Sringeri Sankara Mutt by Sree Chandrasekhara Bharati of Sringeri. My guru Chowdiah who gave the first performance, was kind enough to introduce me and provide me an opportunity to perform in the presence of His Holiness. I was accompanied by ace violinist Ratnagiri Subba Sastry and mridanga vidwan Bangalore M.L. Veerabhadria, a disciple of Palghat Mani Iyer. Thousands of devotees from the south as well as north India attended the festivities and the concerts.

Wasn't Chowdiah known for his generosity?

Yes very much so. He was well known for his appreciation of young and budding musicians. Among other things he accompanied me many times and encouraged me during performances. He was very magnanimous about it.

I have heard you sing many of his compositions. Can you talk about that?

In the early days vidwans like Musiri Subramania Iyer, GNB, and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer participated in films. Inspired by this, Chowdiah produced a movie called *Vani*, for which he was also the music director. Well known dramatist Hirannah acted in the film and also helped Chowdiah with the lyrics. The songs had dramatic tunes. They were not of the standard of compositions in Carnatic music. This gap encouraged

my guru to start composing. He composed nearly 50 compositions in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada including varnam-s, kriti-s and tillana-s. I have edited and brought out a book of nearly 35 of his compositions. The book was published by University of Mysore.

I have heard your concerts from past recordings and I also heard you present one of your compositions in Reetigaula in Sanskrit in one of your concerts. When did you start composing and what motivated you?

When I was the principal of University College of Music and Dance in Mysore, I got to know the great Poet Laureate of Karnataka K.V. Puttappa, popularly known as Kavi Kuvempu. He was instrumental in starting the music college. He asked me to set his poems to tune. I trained my students at the college to sing them in the presence of Kuvempu, the vice chancellor of the university, and other dignitaries. Impressed with the presentation, he wanted to know more about me and my contribution to music. I told him that though I had learnt the compositions of great saints and composers from legendary vidwans and guru-s, presented them in various concerts and taught my students, I did not have any qualification as composer. Kuvempu said, "With your vast experience in music, you should make your own contribution to the field and you must compose. People may criticise your work and none of the compositions may be presented by other artists in your lifetime." He also told me people had criticised his work but that did not stop him from composing. After I die, someone may present one or two of my compositions and I will be satisfied with that.

For the first six months or so I could not even sleep. Composing is very hard. The sahitya has to be unique, scholarly and suit the raga and tala well. When you sing it has to sound really nice and full of bhava. It is not that easy to fit all these key aspects and compose. Moreover, with so many compositions of some of the greatest composers what is the need for me to compose? However, I have composed nearly 25 to 30 compositions in Kannada, Telugu and Sanskrit, and published these in books with detailed notations and chittaswara.

I have had the opportunity to play your compositions in San Jose and other locations.

I am really grateful for the publicity you have given to my compositions.

It was really nice to play the Reetigaula composition. It

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was a real pleasure to listen to your singing and learn and play that composition on the chitraveena. It sounded really good on the instrument. You are being modest about your work. You are self effacing and humble about your compositions.

I had the good fortune of coming into close contact with great vidwans like Vasudevacharya, Ariyakudi, Viswanatha Iyer, Musiri, Chembai and Alathur. They taught me many compositions. But for their generosity, I would not have known what good and pure Carnatic music is supposed to be. I owe much to them for that. Palghat Mani Iyer had very high regard for me and accompanied me in concerts. I was fortunate to know and listen to vidwans like Vasudevacharya and your grandfather Gotuvadyam Narayana Iyengar. I have never heard such nadam and such wonderful music from the instrument after that. Many great vidwans respected Narayana Iyengar deeply and had high regard for him.

Have you heard the music of Veena Seshanna?

No. I did not hear Veena Seshanna live. I had the good fortune of listening to the music of the Karaikudi Brothers during 1965-67. I can never forget their performance. It was beyond my reach, heavenly to listen. Karaikudi Subbarama Iyer (the elder of the Karaikudi Brothers) was one of the greatest vidwans. He composed scholarly chittaswara-s like in *Sobhillu saptaswara* of Tyagaraja in raga Jaganmohini, as well Dikshitar's composition *Ramachandram bhavayami* in Vasanta. His chittaswara compositions were beautiful and wonderful to sing.

Even Vasudevacharya's chittaswara-s for his composition in Mohanam raga *Rara rajeevalochana Rama*, as well as his composition in raga Khamas are really great works. You can definitely compare them to the compositions of the saint composers.

Mysore Sadasiva Rao was a great composer. He was the guru of Veena Seshanna, Veena Subanna and many other great vidwans.

Sadasiva Rao composed in rare tala-s.

Yes. His compositions have been published along with those of Veena Seshanna in the form of two books by Sangeeta Kalabhivardhini Sabha started by Vasudevacharya.

How do you rate Mysore Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar's compositions?

I don't think I am competent to talk about the

sahitya aspect of the Maharaja's compositions. Many scholars feel that his compositions are musically similar to Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositions. Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar was a great Sanskrit scholar and had a good number of books on philosophy to his credit. A disciple of Vasudevacharya, he could consult some of the greatest vidwans and scholars in his palace on the sahitya aspect of music. He had also mastered Western music. He composed some wonderful chittaswara-s, in particular his composition *Sree jalandharam asrayamyabam* in Gambheera Nata raga. He utilised his knowledge of Western music very well.

Did you listen to Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar?

Muthiah Bhagavatar lived in Mysore for a few years during the time of Nalwadi Krishna Raja Wodeyar. He brought out some wonderful compositions in rare raga-s.

What about the Kannada compositions of Muthiah Bhagavatar?

Yes. That is what I have been talking about. Devottamma Sastry provided the sahitya for all the Kannada compositions of Muthiah Bhagavatar.

Tell us something about your writing and books?

I owe much to University of Mysore for all my books. When I started the college, there were no books in Kannada to teach graduate and post graduate students. The Vice Chancellor of the University, D. Javare Gowda, a scholar and writer, persuaded me to write books. My first book *Sangeeta Darpana* sold thousands of copies and has been published many times. I have written nearly 15 books from the beginners to advanced levels. I am really happy about the response the books have received so far.

What do you think of the present generation compared to the golden era?

I have the greatest regard for the vidwans of the past. It is very difficult for me to accord the same to the current generation. The great vidwans were very dedicated artists. They did not pursue art for the sake of money. I have also known and heard of very great vidwans who have not been cared for by the public. I don't deny that current day vidwans are intelligent but that immense dedication is just not there today. The great vidwans have shown us the path to attain good music.

We are really happy that you were able to spend some time with us and share with us some invaluable experiences. Your contributions to music as an artist, guru, composer, and author have been exemplary. ■