

## **Pitchai P.S. Narayanaswamy Respected Musician & Teacher**

P.S. Narayanaswamy, popularly known as Pitchai in Carnatica, was honoured by Sri Krishna Gana Sabha of Chennai with the title of Sangeeta Choodamani on 3 August. This came 46 years after he had received what was probably his first award, the title of Bala Gana Ratnam, given to him in 1946 when he was but 12 years old! Of course, there have been others in between.

Narayanaswamy is one of the well-known disciples of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, at 95 years of age the methuselah of Carnatic music. Starting as a student-in-residence with Semmangudi at a fairly young age, Narayanaswamy had the opportunity of benefitting from the teaching skills and the experience of the master. But, though he has earned a name for himself as a vocalist, the tilt in his career in music has been more towards teaching.

Narayanaswamy was born in Anatandavapuram, one of the 18 villages in the Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, home to the brahmin clan known as Vatima. His father, P.N. Subramaniam, was a doctor. His siblings, while having a liking for music, did not take to it as a profession: the brother became an engineer and the sister a doctor.



Narayanaswamy was not born into a musical family, but his father took keen interest in his career and did all he could to help groom him into a good musician.

Narayanaswamy began learning music at the age of eight from a teacher in the locality in which his family lived. He had talent and aptitude and learning music was not difficult for him. Later his father put him under the tutelage of Tirupamburam Somasundaram Pillai, who was one of the famous nagaswara pair known as the Tirupamburam Brothers. This enabled the young man to get a strong grounding in the basics of Carnatic music from an acknowledged master.

Narayanaswamy's father also made it possible for him to attend the December music festivals in Madras. These visits exposed the lad to the music of different masters of the art; they also helped him to participate in competitions and earn some recognition by winning prizes.

The initiative that led to Narayanaswamy joining Semmangudi's musical stable came from the maestro himself. Perhaps Semmangudi took the initiative because he was impressed by the lad's talent after he heard him sing and perhaps it also helped because both he and Narayanaswamy belonged to the same brahmin community known as Vatima which was concentrated in the aforementioned 18 villages in Tanjavur district. But no sooner Semmangudi suggested to Dr. Subramaniam that he should place his musically promising son under his tutelage, it was implemented.

Narayanaswamy started his gurukulavasam with Semmangudi when he was about 20 years of age. The maestro was then living in Tiruванантаपुरам; the guru-sishya relationship continued when Semmangudi returned to Madras. The active relationship ended when Semmangudi again went to Tiruванантаपुरам, but Narayanaswamy never ceased to be a disciple of the master, even after he gained a standing of his own as a vidwan of acknowledged merit.

He also learnt a number of kriti-s from Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer.

As a concert artist, Narayanaswamy earned considerable respect, though he did not scale the heights of popularity which his mentor did. Connoisseurs knew that his singing was in the mould of his master, though he did not capture in his performances the verve, the vivacity and the spirit of a grand march that were hallmarks of Srinivasa Iyer's music.

Narayanaswamy was a member of the Vadya Vrinda wing of AIR for about 16 years and his musical orchestration has been lauded by senior musicians. One of his compositions was the highlight of the AIR's golden jubilee programme in 1981.

A simple and unassuming person, deeply committed to music, Narayanaswamy has voluntarily participated in many music festivals. He has not missed attending the akhanda gaanam organised every year in Tiruvaigaru on Sivaratri for the last 38 years. He was an active member of the Sadasiva Brahmendra Aradhana Festival organised in Manamadurai for about 14 years, till he took over charge as its president in 2001.

The place he has secured in the annals of Carnatic music is as a sincere and sound teacher. He has taught a large number of disciples and shaped their career. Perhaps more than 80 have benefitted from his teaching-- some as regular disciples and the many who have been coming to him to learn selected compositions. His readiness to share his knowledge and insights and teach the musical skills to utilise them, as well as his gentleness and simplicity, have endeared him to them all and also made him a respected figure among fellow musicians and music lovers. His disciples rallied together to form the PSN Disciples Forum which was launched on 24 December 2000. The title of

Sangeeta Kala Acharya bestowed on him by the Music Academy of Chennai on 1 January 2000 was thus a most appropriate recognition of this side of his career.

Some other notable honours bestowed on Narayanaswamy are: Bala Gana Ratnam (1946, at the age of 12); Asthana vidwan of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham (1990); Sangeetacharya - Sri Sadguru Gnanananda Sangeeta Sammelan (1992); Sangeeta Kala Sagaram - Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham (1996); Isai Selvam - Muthamizh Peravai (1997); and Gana Kalanidhi - Bhandup Fine Arts, Mumbai (1999).

All his life, he has been known as Pitchai to his family and his friends-- most appropriately so because his full-scale disciples who have attained success in the music field would not hesitate to say, using an idiomatic Tamil expression common in Carnatica, that they owe their success to his 'pitchai', or his musical benevolence.

### **- P.C. JAYARAMAN**

#### **PSN's Disciples**

*The following are the names of those receiving instruction from P.S. Narayanaswamy for five years or longer.*

**Abhishek Raghuram; M. Balamuralikrishna; R. Bharathi; Bombay Ranjani & Gayathri; Calcutta V.N. Shankar; C.N. Chandrasekhar; B.U. Ganesh Prasad; Haricharan; Nagpur Jayaraman; Karun Menon; G. Madhavan; A.K. Mahesh; Maithreyi Ramakrishnan; A.S. Murali; Nishanth Chandran; Pushpa Sriram; Radha Bhaskar; Radha Parthasarathy; Raghava Krishna; Rajshri Ramakrishna; C.B. Ramanarayan; S. Ramesh; T.V. Ramprasad; K.G. Ranjith; V.V. Ravi; Saroja Ram; Shankar Srinivas; Shanthi Sriram; Sowmya Arjun; Subbulakshmi Krishnan; Sujatha Narayanamurthy; Swathi Srikrishna; Udupi Gopalakrishnan; P. Unnikrishnan; C.R. Vaidyanathan; Vijayshri; Vikram Vasudevan.**

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