

ANANYA'S SAMPRADAYA

A celebration of our musical heritage

Sunday May 10, 2009 was a red-letter day for Ananya (a cultural organisation in Bangalore) and a vital part of the cultural events diary of music lovers of the city. After the inaugural ceremony and a felicitation function to honour octogenarian vidwan Ananda Rama Udupa, translator into Kannada of the original Telugu (1904) edition of Subbarama Dikshitar's *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*, there were nine events that day, all of them musically enriching. Out of these, two were superbly executed – a torrential extempore lecture by Sriram.V from Chennai, and a concert-turned-into a lecdem by T.M. Krishna, both focusing on, or based on, Subbarama Dikshitar and his monumental creation – the *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini* (SSP).

The programme had a tight schedule from 9.30 am to 8.30 pm. In the event, even the third item was about 90 minutes behind schedule. This was mainly because musicians M.S. Sheela and T.M. Krishna were persuaded to talk, following the formal inaugural speech by N.S. Krishnamurthy, former Station Director, AIR-Bangalore.

The morning started with a chorus rendering of 13 'nottuswara sahitya-s' of Muthuswami Dikshitar by a group of 10 pre-teenage girls, excellently groomed and conducted by Rupa Sridhar, a senior vocalist and guru. Though all the 30-odd nottuswara sahitya of Dikshitar are in Sankarabharanam, the tunes of the 13 pieces were not identical; and remarkably there was no slip-up, apaswara or rendering out-of-step with the tala by any of the children. Their rendering was crisp and neat.

In the inauguration that followed, N.S. Krishnamurthy released a set of audio CDs brought out by the Jnanarava Trust, containing recordings by T.M. Krishna (accompanied by Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi on the veena) of select kriti-s of Muthuswami Dikshitar, as per the notation given by Subbarama Dikshitar in the *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*. One-minute silence was also observed as a mark of respect to the memory of vidwan B. Rajam Iyer.

N.S. Krishnamurthy paid glowing tributes to the tenacity and hard work of octogenarian Ananda Rama Udupa, who had taken up the Kannada translation of the SSP and finished it in three years, hand-writing the entire material with the notations, for offset-printing. It was remarkable that the same letter of his manuscript Kannada alphabet was identical, in size and shape, wherever it occurred.

T.M. Krishna later pointed out that the Tamil translation of the SSP, brought out by the Music Academy, Madras, had taken about eight years beginning 1961. While the Academy had the benefit of a financial grant from the central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Udupa's one-man effort, backed by Ananya, had no such grant. He and M.S. Sheela congratulated Dr. R.V. Raghavendra (Founder & Exec. Trustee of Ananya) for inducing Ananya to take up the gigantic task and for publishing the Kannada SSP in six volumes, plus a seventh one – the Kannada version of Subbarama Dikshitar's *Prathama Abhyasa Pustakamu*. Dr. Raghavendra was lauded also for his several initiatives in launching many series of musical events at Ananya, like those on



Ananda Rama Udupa

thematic concerts, giving a platform for competent youngsters (Arohana), to more mature young musicians (Sangati), Nriytha Dhare (for young dancers), charging no admission fee from the rasika and connoisseur.

T.M. Krishna then outlined his approach to the audio documentation, undertaken by him under the Jnanarava Trust, mainly of songs composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar, and first published by Subbarama Dikshitar in the SSP. This was done in collaboration with his violinist friend R.K. Shriram Kumar, under the guidance and support of Prof. Dr. N. Ramanathan (former HoD, Dept. of Indian Music, University of Madras) and Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi at Chennai. They adhered strictly to the notation given by Subbarama Dikshitar in the SSP. "What we have done is serious documentation. We have audio-recorded, after thorough study and research, to understand what Subbarama Dikshitar believed, practised and put down in writing." Though Krishna has sung for the CDs it was really a team effort by four people. Where the current version of a

familiar song was very different, they have also recorded a contemporary interpretation of the SSP notation so that the listener can see (rather, hear) the difference between the two. All the kriti-s sung by Krishna, are accompanied on the veena by Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi. He added: "Don't buy the CDs to listen to, or to learn the songs from them; these CDs are meant for evolved musicians, music teachers and musicologists". This writer, later at home, listened to two of the CDs titled "Audio Documentation of the compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar – Audio book: Two & Three". By and large the renderings of the kriti-s sounded like geetam-s, with rather plain notes and with an occasional tremor of subtle gamaka-s.

Three senior or veteran vocalists were slated to sing, for about an hour each, with a group of his or her disciples, a set of compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar, not duplicating any song.

The first of these was led by M.S. Sheela who presented the following

five songs, with eight young lady disciples and accompanied by Nalina Mohan (violin) and Anoor Ananthakrishna Sarma (mridanga): *Sree nathadi Gurugubo jayati jayati* (Mayamalavagaula raga, Adi tala), *Mabalakshmi karunarasa* in the rare raga Madhava Manohari, Adi tala 2-kalai, *Bhajare re chitta Balambika* with a delightful alapana (Kalyani raga, Misra Chapu tala), *Sree Guruguba tarayasumam* in another rare raga Devakriya, Roopaka tala, which lasted for only four minutes; and *Veenaabheri venu vadyadi vinodini* in the raga Abheri, which has a melodic colour different from the Abheri of Tyagaraja's famous song *Nagumomu ganaleni*, as Sheela pointed out. This writer had to miss the next segment, a presentation of another set of kriti-s of Muthuswami Dikshitar, by senior vocalist R.K. Padmanabha and his five disciples, (as also another lecture later by Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi on 'Gamaka-s in the SSP') which followed a lecture on 'Subbarama Dikshitar and his SSP' by Sriram.V.

Those who seem to have heard Sriram's lectures on topics musical, at Chennai or elsewhere, were found to shuffle to get seats in the front rows, probably to be better located to see his slated multi-media presentation, which did not happen anyway, due to time over-run. Sriram prefaced his remarks saying that Carnatic musicians in olden days did not believe in written documents and that our music flourished only through the oral tradition: listening to music, to expositions of its theory, history, and the anecdotes of musical luminaries, to learn, to appreciate, and to further hone skills, was the norm. Even our contemporary vidushi T. Brinda (granddaughter of Veena Dhanammal) was against written notations.

Sriram ambled along, without a pause, without referring to any scribbled note, mentioning landmark events in the sporadic documented history and development of Carnatic music. He mentioned the *Bribaddesi* of Matanga; the *Sangeeta Ratnakara*

A group presentation



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of Sarangadeva (who did not then distinguish between North Indian and South Indian music streams); Venkatamakhin's *Chaturdandi Prakasika*, Govinda who systematised Venkatamakhin's ideas and gave a rigorous shape to the grammar of the melakarta raga scheme.

Sriram mentioned that the first book on the theory of our music published as printed was the *Sangeeta Sarvartha Sara Sangrahamu*, by Veenai Ramanujayya (1859); there were later editions, the last of them in 1917. Tacchur Singaracharlu and his brother, who were violinists, became also authors and publishers of music, the most noted of their works being *Gayaka Lochanam* (1902). The earlier works had been originally handwritten on palm leaves or metal foils and printed several decades or a few centuries after they were discovered.

Sriram then gave a biographical sketch of Subbarama Dikshitar (See *Sruti* 245). Sriram recalled T.M. Krishna's observations earlier that the SSP was the embodiment of the prevailing oral tradition which had been documented diligently by Subbarama Dikshitar, covering raga-s, their lakshana-s, in addition to the lyrics of Muthuswami Dikshitar with notation.

Another captivating segment of the day's programme was a concert by a group of seven young musicians, some of whom have had admirable solo concert experience. They were: G. Ravi Kiran, Amruth Nagsundar, Vinay Sharva, Pavandeep, Amrutha Venkatesh, Aishwariya Vidya Raghunath and Vrinda Acharya. The three ladies singing in the '6-kattai sruti', with the males singing the corresponding lower register, made for a pleasing harmony in presentation of the four songs *Sree Ganesatparam* - Ardradesi raga/



T.M. Krishna with H.S. Sudheendra (mridanga)

Jhampa, *Varalaksbimim bhajare* - Saurashtram/ Adi, *Narasimha agaccha* - Mohanam/ Triputa, and *Namaste paradevatey* - Devaranji/ Tisra Ekam.

The third of the mini-concerts by veterans was presented by vidushi Dr. T.S. Sathyavathi, (a Sanskrit scholar and professor, and a senior disciple of vidwan R.K. Srikantan), with eight lady disciples. She was accompanied by Mathur Srinidhi (violin) and Cheluvaraju (mridanga). They presented the following five songs: *Rudrakopa jata veerabhadram* - Rudrapriya raga/ Roopaka tala, *Guruguhaya* - Sama/ Adi, *Sree Mahaganapate ravatumam* - Gaula/ Tisra Triputa, *Kamakshi Varalaksbimi* - Bilahari/ Adi, *Balambikey pahi* - Manoranjani/ Chaturasra Matya. The group rendered the kriti-s with the correct intonation of the Sanskrit words along with appropriate voice modulations intended by the vageyakara Muthuswami Dikshitar.

The next segment featured short vocal recitals by the two prize winners in the music competition held by Ananya a few weeks earlier. Thanmayee Krishnamurthy (second) and Srinidhi Kaushik (first prize winner). This was followed by a felicitation for vidwan Ananda Rama Udupa, the hero of the day-long celebration of 'Sampradaya'.

Udupa thanked everyone and said he was motivated only by his love of music and his reverence for Subbarama Dikshitar and his lineage.

The last, and most awaited item of the day's programme was a concert by T.M. Krishna. He announced that, with the consent of the organisers, he would be presenting a lecdem. He said only 229 kriti-s of Muthuswami Dikshitar had been covered by Subbarama Dikshitar in the SSP. We believe there are nearly 450 Dikshitar kriti-s; are all the extra 220-odd kriti-s *not* by Muthuswami Dikshitar? Some of them, for example, two among the 'navagraha kriti-s' (the ones on Rahu and Ketu) are definitely not by Muthuswami Dikshitar because the Sanskrit used is not of the high level found in his other kriti-s. Krishna added that all songs with the 'Guruguha' mudra need not be assumed to have been created by Muthuswami Dikshitar.

The first of the six songs by Muthuswami Dikshitar which he presented was a short and straightforward piece in Sankarabharanam and Adi tala, *Nagalingam bhajeham*. This was presented as a contemporary interpretation of the SSP notation of the kriti. He was keen to highlight,

within the time available, the differences not only in the styles of rendering of these kriti-s some 150 years ago and today, but also in the lakshya and lakshana aspects of many raga-s as found in the notation of Subbarama Dikshitar in the SSP, differing (sometimes substantially) from what we are familiar with today.

Taking up Asaveri next, he dwelt on the absence of chaturruti rishabha in this raga. Semmangudi had said that he had heard older musicians sing it only with suddha rishabha; the chaturruti *ri* seems to have come into vogue later. T.M. Krishna illustrated this by presenting *Kumaraswaminam* in Adi tala (2-kalai), carefully avoiding the chaturruti 'ri'. Half an hour had elapsed when T.M. Krishna took up his third song, deciding to show up a major difference between the SSP prescription and today's practice in delineating Sahana raga (spelt and pronounced as Shahaana in Karnataka). In his brief alapana, shades of Kanada were discernible if we followed the SSP notation, because the sadharana gandhara was found to occur predominantly with very occasional usage of antara gandhara. In modern usage, only the latter (antara *ga*) is used. The kriti

expounded in the SSP style keeping his grammar was *Eesanadi Sivakara* in Tisra Eka. Kalpana swara was also rendered for this kriti.

Next was a rendering of 'unpolluted' Bhairavi. This whole rendition (alapana, kriti, niraval and kalpana swara) was done with complete adherence not only to the lakshana aspects given in the SSP but also to the lakshya aspects, that is, the gamaka-s as given in the SSP). The Bhairavi as per the SSP uses only suddha dhaivata and chaturruti *dha* occurs only in a couple of specific phrases, unlike today where the chaturruti *dha* is used completely for the assent of '*pa dha ni sa*'. The kriti taken up was the familiar *Balagopala*. Because of the strict adherence to Subbarama Dikshitar's notation, it lacked the sonorous aesthetic glitter of the Bhairavi renderings in vogue since the 1940s. Krishna presented a sumptuous niraval and kalpana swara at 'Neela neerada sareera'.

Next came a rare raga under any scheme: Geervani, according to the Dikshitar school (asampoorna mela paddhati); *Namo namastey* was the kriti projected. Krishna mentioned here that unfortunately some people have turned this into Keeravani

and sing it as mela 21, which is completely unacceptable.

Krishna rounded off his concert-turned-lecture with a rendering of the moving Dikshitar kriti in Tarangini raga, *Maaye tvam yahi*. This, when handled strictly as per the SSP, had a flavour of the raga Charukesi.

Despite the self-imposed constraint by T.M. Krishna (of faithful adherence to the notations given by Subbarama Dikshitar in the SSP) his usual vigour and ecstasy of exposition, garnished with somewhat reduced sparkles of manodharma, made the listening experience of this programme a memorable one. Though figuratively the curtains came down at the close of the day-long celebration of Sampradaya, Krishna was practically mobbed by a large section of the audience with affection, admiration and adoration. H.K. Venkataram, violinist (and a senior executive in the Intel Corp., an IT-MNC), H.S. Sudheendra (mridanga) and the redoubtable Sukanya Ramgopal (ghata) gave excellent but restrained support to Krishna, in deference to his earnestness to project, not himself but, Subbarama Dikshitar and his *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*.