



Sri Ganapati Sachidananda Swami blessing devotees.

Music gives the healing touch

Sri Ganapati Sachidananda Swami has been effectively tapping the soothing properties of ragas. How does he do it?

LAKSHMI DEVNATH explains.

"MUSICAL NOTES have their effects on our body. Why? Because the tunes correspond to our nerves. The knowledge about this is called Ragini Vidya or Siddhi Vidya. When one hears the right kind of music, its effect on the body is therapeutic. The nerves can be touched with the help of music. In fact, so soothing is the outcome, it is as if the nerves are being given a massage." As Sri Ganapati Sachidananda Swamiji of Mysore speaks, his gentle words along with an aura of peace and love that he radiates, have a tranquillising effect on the listener.

The Swamiji is passionate about music. He is not a mere connoisseur. He talks about texts on music that focus on its healing properties, yet he is not just a theoretician.

Prolific composer

He is an accomplished musician and a prolific composer with more than 5,000 compositions, in several Indian languages, to his credit. He has identified a unique purpose for his music — that of healing.

At a music session in Switzerland, in 1992, Sri Swamiji spoke, "There are particular tunes, particular ragas and also particular instruments. When you combine the instruments, which nowadays is called an orchestra, again you get a particular quality. You can compare each instrument with a doctor, specialist who takes care of a specific ailment."

Quest begins

But, let us trace this story to its beginning. The Swamiji's quest began when he was a child of eight. On May 26, 1942, in the small hamlet of Mekedatu, Jayalakshmi and Narasimha Sastri were blessed with a baby boy. They named him Satyanarayana. His parents were en-

grossed in spiritual practices and Satyanarayana grew up in this atmosphere. Even as a young boy, he displayed a natural inclination to classical music and spirituality.

Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamy says, "I was eight years old when I first read in the Sastras about the healing effects of music. I was, by the grace of God, also naturally gifted with this art. With no formal training, I could play various musical instruments like the sitar, veena and so on. I thought my music would be put to good use if it could benefit mankind. I conducted small experiments and they proved successful. This encouraged me to go deeper into the subject."

Nadopasana

Satyanarayana became Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamiji at the age of 22. His mantra was Nadopasana (worship of music). The Swamiji elaborates: "The body has a number of energy centres called chakras and 72,000 metaphysical energy channels called nadis. Each of these has its own elemental basis such as earth, water, fire, etc. Each raga produces sound vibrations appropriate to a specific element and therefore to a specific chakra and a set of related body organs."

So how does the Swamiji apply this therapy? He explains: "I primarily rely on my intuition when it comes to prescribing the right kind of music for a patient. When I see an ill person, I can intuitively identify the kind of music that will benefit him. While specific ragas like Nilambari, Charukesi and so on do have special therapeutical properties, I also create my own combinations of notes, in specified frequencies. I call this process 'sampling.'" As a first step in this methodology, the Swamiji requests various musi-

cians to play several notes as specified by him on their respective instruments. Interestingly, this experiment also includes musical instruments of other countries.

Once Swamiji is convinced about the right note and its right frequency it is fed into the synthesiser that he describes as a modern vina. The end product is a unique composition created by the Swamiji that assures a primary or supplementary cure for diseases.

The Swamiji has also adapted the basic melodic structure of some select kritis of Saint Tyagaraja like Mokshamu Galada (Saramati), Shobillu Saptaswara (Jaganmohini), Samaja vara gamana (Hindolam) and so on.

Namasankirtana

But what about vocal music? Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda Swamiji is an ardent votary of Namasankirtana. He has himself composed several bhajans that are also said to be replete with curative powers for as he says, "the lyrics of my bhajans incorporate several bijaksharas (mystical syllables) in them.

The Swamiji bases his compositions mainly on the ragas of Carnatic music — its 72 melas (parent ragas) and their innumerable off spring. "Incidentally," says the Swami, "I come in the lineage of the father of the 72 Melakartha scheme — Venkatamakhi, although not a direct descendant.

All the top performers of Carnatic music consider it an honour to provide accompaniment to the Swamiji's performances. They are his ardent devotees too. Violin maestro Chowdiah was the first to have accompanied the Swamiji in his bhajan sessions.

Many of these performances have been recorded and form a part of the ashram's 'music for healing' series. The Swamiji always recommends that his music be used in addition to the treatment for it expedites the healing process.

The Ashram's literature records studies conducted on various patients and their positive responses to musical therapy.