

Looking back ...

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Now will the same logic apply if our artistes went there?

Come on! Who wants to listen to our music there? They don't understand it. You know there was this Ustad from the north, who once asked me "Why are there so many Aksharams in your music?" He meant our Swara Prastharas. I gave him a small demonstration of our Kalpana Swaram. The man was so amazed and fell at my feet. I subsequently remarked that I was only a small fry in this field, and he should hear some of our stalwarts.

What was the criteria you adopted when you tuned the kritis of Swati Tirunal and others?

Let me make it clear. I did not tune the kritis of Swati Tirunal, except a few perhaps. I compiled them and notated them in the original ragas. That is all. I did tune the kritis of Narayana Teertha, Sadasiva Brahmendra and others. Anyway my notations are seldom followed. Each singer tunes them according to his inclinations.

Have you composed any piece?

No! No! No! My elder brother Narayanaswami Iyer advised me not to compose. You know if there are mistakes of any sort in a composition the composer is undone. I think you have to decide what kind of life you want to lead before you venture into these things. As regards ragas you can create any number of them but shouldn't each have a distinct swaropa (character)? One shouldn't struggle to find out the name of a raga. It has to be like a Bhairavi or a Sahana or Begada.

Can you tell me about your seniors and your peers?

Ariyakudi's "Daasharathe" still

rings in my ears. He was a very intelligent man. His music has dignity. He would also never fuss when asked to sing. I can say sincerely that he was my 'Manaseeka guru' I have learnt a few kritis from him too. More than anything else, he would never hurt anybody. Chembai had a great voice, which strictly adhered to Sruti, but his sahithyams would go for a toss when he sang. Madurai Mani was younger in age but my senior on the platform. You know in those days they would alter wedding dates to suit Madurai Pushpavanam's availability (if they wanted him to sing). GNB had a great voice, which obeyed all his commands. Of course he was very intelligent as well. The music for which I have great admiration is that of T. Brinda's. What a 'Patantharam'! It is so perfect. I don't think I can ever sing like that.

You had a lot of influential friends like T. T. Krishnamachari and the likes. Were they helpful in giving a boost to your career?

No doubt. I got a lot of concerts because I was associated with them. But I owe my association with them to Sadasivam. I had other friends in the music circle too like Musiri Subramania Iyer.

You have never gone abroad and given concerts. Do you regret that?

I didn't go abroad because my father was against it and I think elders words have to be respected, whatever may be the justification otherwise. For that matter even Ariyakudi, GNB never went. What is the point in earning too much? Anyway, it goes towards paying taxes. I was very happy with my stint in the Thiruvananthapuram palace. They gave me a house a car and all

comforts. I loved Trivandrum.

What about your progeny? Why haven't they taken to music?

There is too much of music today. Probably it has even reached the level of saturation. In this situation, they can thrive only on my recommendation. I don't want that. They all sing and my daughter even plays the veena, but at home.

What is your opinion on today's dwindling audience participation?

Earlier, people used to stand in queues and buy tickets for our concerts. You can't dream of that happening nowadays. Like I said even too much of a good thing is bad. But I guess still some musicians attract crowds. Don't they?

What has been your contribution towards music in the last ten years i.e., since your eightieth birthday?

Nothing really. I just spend time by myself. Not many people even come to learn probably because I don't charge anything. I will not sell my music.

Tell us a few words on the correct methods of practice (sadakham)

There is no need of practice for seven to eight hours. An intelligent practice for about two to three hours is more than sufficient. Also Karvai Sadakham (standing on one note for a stretch of time) is very important.

Looking back at your life do you have any regrets?

One cannot be without regrets, but I feel about one aspect the most. Earlier on I would not pay my supporting sishyas anything. But then I didn't have much money at that point of time. I regret that very much. Today I give remuneration to the younger students who give me voice support if I am paid well.