

# Passion for the seven notes

**LEGEND** Although music was not his vocation, RR's fervour led to a prolific output.

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The year 1947 was significant for India, more so for the Carnatic music fraternity. That year marked the 100th death anniversary of Tyagaraja. One music connoisseur and ardent aficionado of the art decided that the most befitting way to honour the composer was by documenting his compositions. He was Rangaramanuja Ayyangar. At a public meeting in 1947 at the Madras Museum Theatre, RR, as he was popularly known, released his 'Kritimanimalai.' The book contained detailed notations for a 100 compositions of Tyagaraja, besides the lyrics of the songs in both Tamil and Telugu, raga lakshanas, Tamil translations of the lyrics, a biography of the saint-composer, nuggets of information on the theory of music and several anecdotes on music and musicians.

## Trailblazer

RR though not a pioneer in the art of publishing kritis with swara notation, did blaze a trail in its path. Five more volumes of Kritimanimalai hit the stands

by 1954. Subsequently, the contents of the books were further expanded and the six volumes were then condensed into four. These included 688 songs of Tyagaraja, 400 songs of Dikshitar, 380 songs of other composers including Syama Sastri, 100 padams of Kshetrajna, Sarangapani and others, songs of other composers like Pallavi Gopalayyar, Patnam Subramanya Iyer, Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar, 50 javalis, 13 tillanas, and a self-instruction manual. The year 1965 saw a notated version of Jayadeva's Gita Govindam, 1972 - the History of South Indian Music from Vedic Times to the present day, 1973 - a Critical Study of the Sangita Ratnakaram, 1974 - Pallavi Tradition in Carnatic Music and 1977 - Musings of a Musician.

## Single-handed

And that is not all. RR's notation-writing skills were used in full measure both in the production of the Keertanamalai of Papanasam Sivan in 1934 as also in the Purandamanimalai in 1941 brought out by Lalithangi and her daughter MLV. A post-

humous publication of a commentary in English on the Ramayana completes the list of his published works. Certainly a mind-boggling output made more impressive by the fact that it was entirely a single-handed effort.

Significantly, music was not RR's vocation. But the intense ardour he displayed accorded it the status of a privileged avocation. In fact, the seven notes lured him when he was yet a child. Born in Mannargudi, on February 2 1901, he grew up on the rich and nutritious music feast provided by the likes of Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer, Kanchipuram Nayana Pillai, Poochi Iyengar and a galaxy of others.

Even as a child, he discovered in himself an uncanny ability to translate music or rhythmic phrases into swara syllables. Academically, he qualified himself both as a graduate and as a teacher.

Even in modest terms, he could be described a scholar in English, Sanskrit and Tamil.

RR did not have much formal training in music except for a brief spell under veena Dhanammal.

However, in his early years, he was influenced greatly by the music of Rajagopala Dikshitar, the chief priest at the Rajagopalaswami temple, Mannargudi as also by the great vidwan Simizhi Sundaram Iyer. But, other than Tyagaraja, Dhanam was the on-

ly personality in Carnatic music that RR virtually idolised. To him, she symbolised all that was true and great in music.

For 12 years he was a regular visitor to her celebrated Friday soirees at Madras. He learnt from her directly for two years till her death in 1938. He installed a life-size statue of her in its precincts. RR was a creditable musician with a penchant for playing other instruments like the flute, the violin, the jalatarangam and the kanjira.

## Honest comments

Despite his credentials he was never a star performer in the contemporary sense of the term. This could be because he fought shy of seeking opportunities to perform and his social skills were also dismally low.

He was known for his acerbic and honest comments on the music of his peers. Thus, the reviews he wrote under the pen name of Sabari, in the magazine *Kaveri*, were as much anticipated, as they were dreaded. As a teacher, however, he was very successful.

Till his last years he led a very active and fruitful life. On May 20, 1980, Rangaramanuja Ayyangar breathed his last but not before he had voiced his regret - his inability to work on the Silappadikaram.



**PIONEER:** Rangaramanuja Iyengar.



**COMPREHENSIVE:** First of a series.

## Remembering RR

Narada Gana Sabha and Vipanci Cultural Trust, Mumbai have jointly organised a function to commemorate the 25th death anniversary of R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar at Narada Gana Sabha Mini Hall, TTK Road on May 20 at 6.30 p.m. An English adaptation of Volumes 1 and 2 of the musician-musicologist's Tamil Magnum Opus, 'Krtimanimalai' will be

released on the occasion by his daughter-disciple, Padma Varadan. N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu*, will preside and release the books. Music critic K. S. Mahadevan, who will be the chief guest, will receive the first copy. S. Rajam will give a brief introduction on the books and share his memories of RR. This will be followed by a veena recital by Padma Varadan.