

Scholarly composer

“**S**ABESA NAYAKI...,” emotions surged forth in the form of a song from the lips of Dr. V.V. Srivatsa. The song was addressed to Devi Kantimati of Tirunelveli. It was on a plaintive note. Not surprising, for Srivatsa was in a disturbed frame of mind. Only a few days earlier, there had occurred a serious breakdown of machinery in his work spot, which if not rectified immediately threatened to be disastrous for those involved in the operations. Under these circumstances, an appeal to the Goddess for help took a musical form. This was not surprising, for Srivatsa was familiar with Carnatic music from an early age.

In later years, he had also honed his music skills under stalwarts like Sangita Kala Acharya K.H. Mahadeva Bhagavatar, S. Parthasarathy of the Tillaisthanam lineage of Tyagaraja, Mannargudi Naganatha Iyer and the doyenne of Carnatic music, D. K. Pattammal.

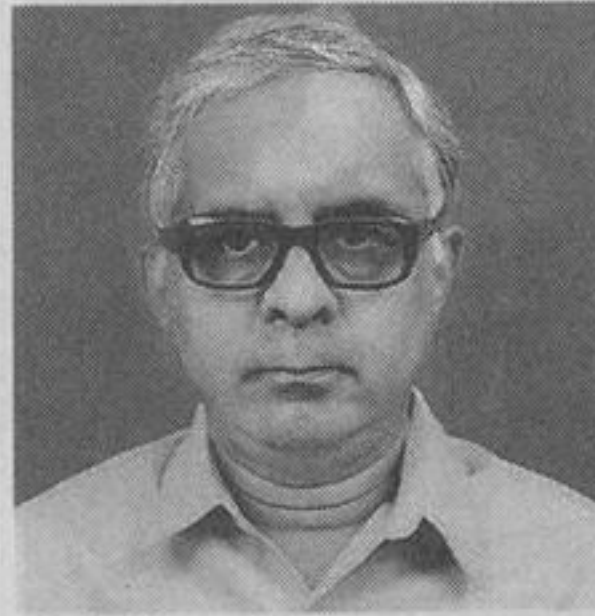
“Nee pannu, naan paadaren...” (you compose and I shall sing) — Pattammal spontaneously gave an assurance to Srivatsa on hearing his composition in

raga Nilambari. Srivatsa needed no other stamp of approval for his compositions. He was also inherently confident about his composing abilities. This self-assurance probably stemmed from his academic and musical background. Srivatsa, a qualified metallurgist and a material science expert, is adept at 16 languages that include several foreign ones like Italian, German, French and Spanish amongst several others. He is also a scholar of certain traditional subjects like ‘Meemaamsa’ and the ‘Paancharaatra Agama.’

While Srivatsa’s songs originate from this foundation, he draws his inspiration to compose from the fabled Muthuswamy Dikshitar.

Srivatsa says, “Dikshitar is my role model in more ways than one.” Whether it is the choice of the language Sanskrit for his songs, the melodic mould in which they are couched, the characteristic madhyamakala sahitya (concluding passage in a comparatively fast tempo) or even the style of incorporating the name of the raga into the lyrics, the stamp of Dikshitar on Srivatsa is strong and clear.

He is also an ardent devotee



of the legendary composer. Apart from worshipping him, Srivatsa has rendered yeoman service by presenting, recording and preserving all the 438 compositions of Dikshitar for posterity. This work has been done through his outfit, predictably called ‘Guruguhanjali’ that is entirely funded by him.

Admittedly following in the steps of Dikshitar, Srivatsa’s songs nevertheless are original in their conception. In his own words, “I am the only composer who has composed using the Khanda Jati (finger count of five) in all the seven traditional talas. My compositions include a rare one on Lord Dhanvantari of Srirangam. While I have certainly borrowed some raga phrases from Dikshitar, my

tunes are original.” Songs on the pontiffs of the Kanchi and Sringeri Maths, a commemoration song to mark the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda’s address at the Chicago Parliament of religions are but a sampling of his individualistic creations. While he chooses only traditional ragas for embedding his songs, he has trod the adventurous path in setting the tala framework for them. Srivatsa says, “I make no claims that my compositions emerge without any effort on my part. I work hard at each one of them. It is 85 per cent perspiration and the rest inspiration. I first decide on the theme and then match the raga to the mood of the lyrics.” Srivatsa’s compositions, till date, number 84. They comprise kritis and a few pallavis. The themes of the songs are on several God and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon.

To a pointed question as to whether songs in Carnatic music could also be composed on other themes like the beauty of Nature, he replies, “That is a good idea. I may think about it in the future.”

To another question as to how he intended to propagate

his songs, he replies, “I don’t compel anyone to sing my songs but there are several musicians who, of their own volition, render them on platforms. To them, I am grateful.”

True to her words, Pattammal for 11 successive years, till her retirement, sang one composition of Srivatsa’s every year, at her concerts at the Music Academy.

Other musicians who have rendered his compositions include D. K. Jayaraman, R. Vedavalli, B. Rajam Iyer, Mysore Doreswamy Iyengar, N. Ramani and Maharajapuram Santhanam. Young musicians of today are also including his compositions in their concerts. The mudras or signature that mark his songs are Srivatsa or Sri Suta. Srivatsa has also several books and articles on music to his credit. An expert committee member and a Secretary of the Music Academy, he was honoured by the organisation on January 1, 2003 with the Vaggeyakara award. On a parting note, he says, “I submit all my achievements at the feet of Muthuswamy Dikshitar.”

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