

Contribution of ŚrīMāN VinjamūRi VaradarāJa IyengāR to The Field of Carnatic Music

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Abstract

Carnatic music hails a varied, rich, and great tradition. A large number of Musician – Composers have significantly contributed to enrich our musical heritage. The present-day Carnatic music got its shape at the hands of Musical Trinity . Then onwards, Carnatic music world witnessed many brilliant composers as well as stalwart musicians . At one time , the Carnatic music scenario dazzled up with many stalwarts like AriyakuḍiRāmā nuja Iyengar , Tiger Varadācāriar , ÇembaiVaidyanāthaBhāgavatār, MaharājapuramViśwanāthalyer and many others who had not only trained but also inspired generations of classical musicians to flourish into great artistes. ‘GānaKaḷānidhi’ ŚrīVinja mūriVaradarājalyengār, the disciple of Tiger Varadācāriar , belonged to this category with multi -faceted accomplishments . The present paper focuses on highlighting his multifaceted personality and his outstanding contribution of ŚrīVinjamūri to Carnatic music as a Musician, Musicologist and Vāggēyakāra (Composer).

Key words: Vinjamūri, Tiger Varadācāriar, Vāggēyakāra, Rāga, Varṇam, Kṛti

Introduction

There are many stars in the firmament of South Indian classical music. One of the shining stars is GānaKaḷānidhi Dr. VinjamūriVaradarājalyengār (1915-1991). Popularly known as "Vinjamūri" in the music field, he was born in Guntur, now in Andhra Pradesh on July 15, 1915. He was the son of Śrī V . Bhāvanācāriar and Smt . Kanakavalli. For Vinjamūri , music was not just a profession but it was his passion and the core of his being, music was a way to salvation and the name, fame and fortune that accompanied being incidental. He was an allrounder with deep knowledge in religion, politics, literature, linguistics and a host of other subjects . In late twenties and early thirties , even as a teenager , Vinjamūri was an active participant in the National Independence Movement. He combined in him the greatest values of India’s cultural tradition with modern education.

Guru Śiṣya Parampara

VinjamūriVaradarājalyengārbelonged to the hoary Śiṣya Parampara of ŚrīTyāgarāja . He came under the tutelage of two famous musicians of his time –ŚrīPirāṭṭa ŚankaraŚāstri (1884–1951), the court musician of Mukthyā laSamsthānam, Andhra Pradesh, who in turn belonged to the VīṇaKuppayyar School and later Śrī Tiger Varadā cāriar(1876-1950) of the then Madras region, who belonged to the MānambuçāvaḍiVenkaṭaSubbayyar School . He imbibed the best of



these traditions and followed throughout his life, he strictly adhered to them and also propagated them through his singing in concerts throughout the country and abroad and through various writings in newspapers and magazines, through talks and programmes over All India Radio.

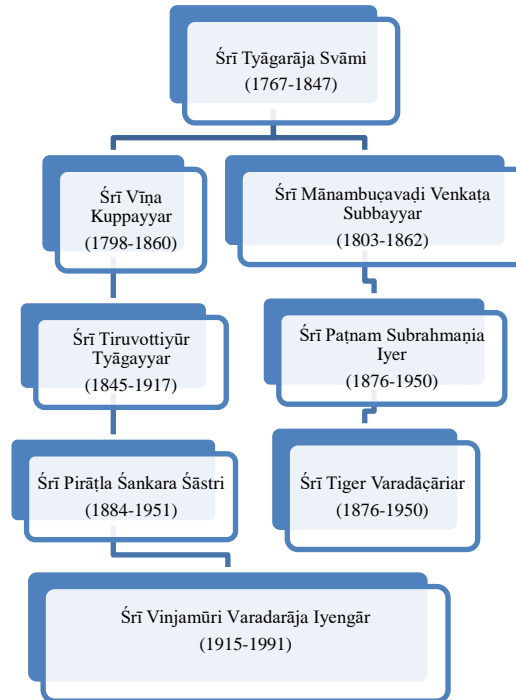
Music and Education

Vinjamūri was a graduate in arts (B.A.) from Andhra University in the year 1935. Later he obtained Diploma in Music from Madras University under Tiger Varadācāriar in 1937. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Columbia University in 1964 for his achievements in music. He was fondly known as ‘Kutty Tiger’ for his strict adherence to his master’s style of Sampradāya singing. He also considered AriyakūḍiRāmānujaIyengār as his ‘Mānasika Guru.’ He was also known as ‘Andhra Ariyakūḍi’.

Accolades and Accomplishments

Vinjamūri gave his first public performance at the age of 7 years in the presence of VīṇaŚēṣaṅga in Guntur. Later on, over the years, he received many accolades for his marvellous singing talents. A few are quoted below

- 1) Impressed by his rendering of TōḍiRāga in the Palace of Mahārāja of Travancore in the presence of late ĆitraTiruṅāl in 1930’s, he was called “TōḍiVaradarājaIyengār”.
- 2) Another incident occurred when he sang the Kṛti of Tyāgarāja “NīĆittamu” in Dhanyāsirāga at MuktyālaSamsthānam in the presence of his Guru ŚrīPirāṭṭaŚankaraŚāstri. He made a detailed neraval at the Ćaraṇam “GuruvēĆillaginja” with full of ‘bhāva’ and emotion, which moved his Guru to shed tears and compose poems extempore blessing his disciple.
- 3) In a concert conducted by Rasika Ranjani Sabha in 1935, where programme was to be by ŚrīAriyakūḍiRāmānuja Iyengar along with KumbhakōṇamŚrīRājamaṅikiamPiḷḷai on violin



and PudukkōṭṭaiŚrīDakṣiṅāmūrthyPiḷḷai on Mṛdangam, Ariyakūḍifelt sick just before the



concert and asked Vinjamūri to take his place and perform. Young Vinjamūri, who was just about 20 years, performed and got accolades from Ariyakuḍi and the two stalwarts accompanying him for his brilliant concert.

- 4) In another concert, Vinjamūri himself had to perform along with ŚrīPazhaniSubrahmaṇyaPiḷlai on Mṛdangam and Śrī Mysore Chowdaiah on Violin. But unfortunately, Chowdaiah couldn't reach the venue in time for some reason. Then eminent Flutist T.R. Mahālingam who was in the audience to witness the concert, offered Vinjamūri to accompany him on his Flute for the concert in place of the violin. And the audience had a three-hour glorious music recital with Vinjamūri singing and the famous Māli playing on the Flute.

Multi – faceted Personality

Vinjamūri was an outstanding Musician, a respected Musicologist, a great Vāggēyakāra (composer), whose compositions won the appreciation of many great Vidwān-s. a brilliant orator who can speak on any topic of music, which earned him the name 'Walking Encyclopedia' of music. He was a Music Administrator-First Principal of the Music College, Hyderabad (1952-53), Producer of Music at All India Radio, Hyderabad (1954-64). He was associated with a number of Music organizations including the TyāgarājaĀrādhanaMahōtsava Sabha, Tiruvaikyāru.

Contribution to Music

a) As a Tunesmith

Vinjamūri's contribution to the field of music is remarkable. He set to music the compositions, operas and other musical forms created by many other vāggēyakāra-s. These included Annamācārya Sankīrtana-s, Purandaradāsa Kīrtana-s, Sadāśiva Brahmēndra Kīrtana-s, Āṇḍāl's Tiruppāvai, Lakshmi Narasimha Stōtram, compositions of Tumu Narasimhadāsu, Munipalle Subrahmaṇya Kavi, Cheyyūr Chengalvarāya Śāstri and others. He also set to music and broadcast number of musical operas such as NaukaĀritram and Pahlāda Bhakti Vijayam of Tyāgarāja and Pallaki Sēva Prabandham of Shahaji Maharāja of Tanjore. He had given talks on Rāga Lakshana-s of nearly 200 rāga-s from All India Radio, Chennai as well as AIR Hyderabad. He was the first to introduce programmes like Bhaktiranjani, Sangita Sikṣana, Vādyabr̄ndam, musical operas on All India Radio, Hyderabad in 1956, which later on became model for other Radio Stations.

b) As a Vāggēyakāra (Composer)

Vinjamūri always considered that the musical outpourings of the Trinity were sufficient for anyone to immerse in Nāda Sudha and drink the Celestial ambrosia of the Divine Music. He felt that any new compositions should add musical value and not just increase the numbers and due to this belief, he composed very few compositions, but each replete with great musical value and uniqueness. He composed in various musical forms like Varṇam, Kṛti, Jāvaḷi and Tillāna. His mudra is 'Varadarāja'.

Varṇam-s

- He composed three Varṇams – the first being Ghanarāgamālika Varṇam. Though there is a



Varṇam in Nava Ghana Rā ga-s attributed to Kā lahastiVenkaṭasāmiRāja, this GhanarāgamālikaVarṇam of Vinjamūri is the one of its kind to be composed in five Ghanarāga-s – Nāṭa, Gauḷa, Ārabhi, Varāḷi and Śrī. Here in this particular Varṇ am, it is interesting to note that Pallavi, Anupallavi and Mukṭāyisvara are set to the rāga-sNāṭa, Gauḷa and Ā rabhi respectively , Čaraṇam and the first ettugaḍ asvaram inrā gaVarāḷi, the second ettugaḍasvaram in Śrīrāgam and all the five ghanarā ga-s appear in the third ettugaḍ asvaram but in an order of Nā ṭa, Gauḷa, Ārabhi, Śrī and Varāḷi which is different from the common tradition of singing Varā ḷi first and then Śrīrāgam. It seems that here he has followed VīṇaDhanammāl's tradition in projecting the unusual combination of singing Varā ḷi after Śrīrāga in Ghanarāgapančakam.

- His second Varṇ am is in the rāgaSindhurāmakriya, a rāga that Vinjamūri loved and sang brilliantly.The Kṛti 'SudhāMādhuryaBhāṣaṇa' in this rāga composed by ŚrīTyāgarāja was his favourite and he popularized it throughout the South. Vinjamūri, once again, is the first to have composed a Varṇam in this rāga.
- His third Varṇam is in the rāgaSwararanjani, a rare Janyarāga belonging to the 29thMēḷa, DhīraŚankarābharaṇam. Only one Kṛti - 'RaghunāthaNannu' by ŚrīRāmnāḍŚrīnivāsaIyengār is composed in this rāga. This is a beautiful Varṇam by Vinjamūri in the rare rāga bringing out the rāgaLakṣaṇam and Svarūpma excellently.

Thus, all the three Varṇam-s composed by Vinjamūri are unique.

Kṛti-s

- Among the Kṛti-s, 'Jāgēlarā' in the rāgaHēlavati is the first onewhich he composed when he was hardly 25 years old. It is composed on the patterns of ŚrīTyāgarāja's compositions. This Kṛti is set to Ā diTāḷa, Madhyamakāla, brimming with the essence of the rāga and very much suitable to be sung in the early part of the concert, building up the tempo of the concert. It is also suitable for elaborate singing as the main item.
- 'Narasimha nannubrōva' in Bilahari was composed in praise of Lord Lakshmi Narasimha of Mangaḷagiri, a shrine near Guntur, Andhra Pradesh . Though the opening words resemble TyāgarājaKṛti in the same rāga , the Dhātu and Mātu of these two compositions are entirely different. This composition of Vinjamūri is in Tiger Varadāčāriar'sBāṇi full of ViśēṣaPrayōga-s. This Kṛti can be sung in both MadhyamaKāla and VilambaKāla depending on the mood of the hour.
- He composed a Kṛ ti in rāga Kharaharapriya on Mahatma Gandhi on his assassination on January 30, 1948 which starts with 'Vandanamu Gandhi dēva'.
- 'PadmāvatimBhajāmyaham' is a Kṛti on Goddess of Tiruchānūr composed in the rāgaŚankarābharaṇam.

Tillāna-s

- His Tillāna-s in Hamī rKalyāṇi and Hindō ḷam are very popular as Concert pieces as well as Dance numbers and the thirdTillānais in Rare RāgaŚankari – a rāga with only four notes , which is a Janya of 29thMēḷa. The Ārōhaṇa and Avarōhaṇa are s g p n ś – ś n p g s . Though there is a Kṛti in this rāga composed by MuttaiahBhāgavatār ,Vinjamūriis the only one to



compose a Tillāna in this rare rāga. Being a four-note rāga, this Tillāna is very much suitable to be played on instruments like Violin, Mandolin etc. It is a very lilting and pleasing composition.

Jāvaḷi-s

- He also composed Jāvaḷi-s in Maṇṇirangu and Sāraṅga. It seems no other composer has composed a Jāvaḷi in rāgaMaṇṇirangu, which is again a unique contribution of Vinjamūri.

c) As a Performer

- The singing of VinjamūriVaradarājaḷyengār was known for its weighty classicism. He imbibed the best from his great Guru-s. Blessed with a rich voice which effortlessly traversed all the three octaves, he enthralled audience with his manōdharmā. His rendering of Koluvaḷiyunnāḍē and Yārigeyāruṇḍu in Bhairavi, ŚrīSubrahmaṇyaya and ŚrīRaghuvarāpramēya in Kāmbhōji, Brōvavamma in Mānji, ŚrīRājagōpāla in Sāvēri, Akṣayalingavibhō and Eduṭanilaḷitē in Sankarābharaṇam, Ḷakkaniṛājamārgamu and Kōrisēvimparārē in Kharaharapriya, Darinitelusukonṭi in Suddhasāvēri, Ēmijēsītēnēmi and RājuVeḷale in Tōḷi, Rāmāninnē and MōhanaRāma in Mōhana, Mōkṣamugalaḍā in Sāramati etc. stands par excellence. His repertoire was vast and contained many rare kṛti-s which became popular on his rendering them for the first time. One of such rare kṛti-s was “Kāḷarātrisvarūpiṇi” in rāgaŪrmika, composed by ŚrīMuttaiyahBhāgavatār. He was the first person to learn the kṛti soon after its birth and popularised it by singing and teaching to many.
- He was an expert in rendering RāgamTānam Pallavi. He was regularly broadcasting a variety of ancient pallavi-s in intricate tāḷa-s over the All India Radio. His Tānam singing was in Tiger Bāṇi with full of vigour and weight. He rendered pallavi-s in raktirāga-s like Bhairavi, Tōḷi, Śankarābharaṇam, Kāmbhōji as well as in rāga-s like Bhavapriya, Varāḷi, Sāvēri, Ṣaṇmukhapriya, Bēgaḍa etc. His concerts often lasted for about 4 to 5 hours. Many stalwarts accompanied him on violin, mṛdangam, ghaṭam and kanjira for his concerts.
- He even gave performances in Rangoon, Kaulalampur, Singapore, Colombo, Jaffna, Candy and other eastern countries. He was honoured by the Music Associations at Washington D.C., New York, Denver, Colorado and Pittsburgh.

d) Acquaintance with other styles of Music

Vinjamūri was well versed in Hindusthāni and Western music on par with Carnatic Music. But he maintained pure Carnatic style without any adulteration. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Pandit OmkarnathThakur, HirabaiBarodekar of Hindusthāni music were his friends. He regularly heard and made notes on Western and other Oriental classical music. He had a vast collection of literature on music, particularly, manuscripts. He also had musical instruments of rare value – a tambura handed down by his guru, said to belong to Mānambuḷavāḍi Parampara and the Vīṇa of Late Bangalore Nāgaratnammāḷ. He had collection of instruments from various countries.

e) As a Musicologist

He was a musicologist and a prolific writer about music. He delivered lectures on AIR Madras, Hyderabad, Vijayawada in Telugu, Tamil and English languages. His articles were published in



many magazines as well as Vāṇi , Vānoli and Indian Listener of the All India Radio. He gave lecture cum demonstrations to several distinguishing visitors such as Music Professors from Western Universities etc, giving the relative merits of the Indian and Western Music systems. He had a vast collection of classical music recordings from various countries.

f) As a Teacher

He trained several hundreds of pupils and many of them have become professional artists . Prominent among them are K . Chandramouli, former Principal of Govt . College of Music , Kurnool, Radha Śrīhari, Y.Varalakshmi, RajamPushpavanam, A. Mrinalini, Swaminathan etc. A large no. of well-known artists had learnt rare Kṛti-s from him.

Titles and Honours

He received numerous titles and honours throughout his life. A few of them are: 1)Gold Medal of Music Academy, Madras, 1936, 2)Gāna Vidyā Viśārada, 1938, 3) Gāyakaratna, 1941, 4)GānaKaḷānidhi, 1950, 5)GāyakaSārvabhūma, 1956, 6)SangītaJyōti, 1961, 7)GānaKaḷāPrapūrṇa, 1971, 8)GānaLahari, 1981, 9)SangītaRatnākara, 1982.

He was invited to sing in Rājbhavan-s and Rāṣṭrabhavan -s. He sang in the presence of every President of India starting from Late Babu Rajendra Prasad upto Late V .V. Giri. He gave a performance during coronation of Maharāja of Mysore late Jayachāmarājēndra Wodayar . He sang during the marriage of Maharāja of Vizianagaram in 1943. He performed in all Samsthāna -s and Sabha-s during his period.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, he met with an accident in 1962, which badly affected the great tonal quality of his powerful voice. He occasionally performed then onwards. He attained the Lotus Feet of the Lord on August 16, 1991.

‘GānaKaḷānidhi’ Dr.VinjamūriVaradarājaIyengār, by all his virtues , is a Trendsetter and widely respected Carnatic Musician , Musicologist, and Vāggēyakā ra (Composer) par excellence. His Contribution to the field of Carnatic Music is enormous, outstanding and remarkable.

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