



The musical journey of Padmabhushan Sangeeta Kalanidhi Late Dr. Sri Sripada Pinakapani

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Purpose of this article

This article is an effort to enumerate the musical pursuit of Padmabhushan Sangeeta Kalanidhi Late Dr. Sri Sripada Pinakapani while he was in Kurnool and how such efforts may have contributed to the growth of Kurnool as a prominent centre of Carnatic music.

Abstract

The legendary musical journey and the contributions of Padmabhushan Sangeeta Kalanidhi Late Dr. Sri Sripada Pinakapani to Carnatic music are widely known and appreciated by followers of Carnatic music. Dr. Sri Sripada Pinakapani spent most of his professional life in Kurnool and consequently, most of his musical efforts, including his mentoring of many renowned Carnatic music exponents happened in Kurnool. These aspects of Sri Pinakapani's life are relatively unknown and are explored in considerable detail in this article.

Sri Pinakapani Garu's Childhood & His Introduction to Carnatic Music

Sri Sripada Pinakapani garu was born in the village of Priya Agraharam in Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh in 1913 to Sri Sripada Kameswara Rao and Smt. Jogamma.

At the age of 6 or 7 years, the young Pinakapani garu would accompany his sister to her music class, he would observe his sister learn from her Guru, Sri Mysuru Lakshmana Rao Panthulu garu. Apparently, he would complain that his sister is not singing correctly and that she is not following her Guru's instruction. It seems the Guru later informed Sri Pinakapani's parents that the boy had better music abilities than his sister, that he should learn music and that he had a great future in music. But the young Pinakapani garu was not interested in learning music since he thought that it was only meant for girls.

Sri Pinakapani's grandfather, Sri Kameswara Rao, used to take his grandchildren to dramas that were staged in town; most of these dramas involved actors singing poems and verses in between dialogues and the young Pinakapani garu would repeat some of those poems in similar singing style as that of the drama actors, upon returning home.

Later his grandfather (Sri Kameswara Rao) convinced the young Pinakapani garu to learn music by advising him that music is not just for girls and that learning music would help him a lot in his future life. Sri Pinakapani garu agreed and started learning from Sri Mysuru Lakshmana Rao Panthulu garu. It seems the Guru had a distinct style of instruction where he would teach even the basic through notation. He would ask the young Pinakapani to sing the 'swaras' associated with any song. This laid a strong musical foundation for Sri Sripada Pinakapani garu. It seems he used to notate any song he used to listen from anyone. It seems Sri Pinakapani garu learnt 18 or 19



varnams from his Guru at a young age. He also taught him many krithis and asked Sri Pinakapani garu to write down all varnams and Krithis and notate them; the Guru would then review everything and make any required corrections.

After he taught everything he knew to Sri Pinakapani garu, the Guru advised him to go to Madras to learn since there were no music scholars in the Telugu speaking regions, apart from one or two – one of them, apparently was the Guru of Late Sri Balamurali Krishna garu.

Sri Pinakapani Garu's Formal Learning and Grooming in Carnatic Music

Sri Pinakapani garu took his Guru's advice and used to go to Madras to attend all the concerts (Kacheris) happening during the music season. He would diligently carry a notebook and pencil to every concert and would notate any new krithi he would listen to, during the concert. He would share those notations with his Guru once he came back to his native place. To pursue his passion in music, Sri Pinakapani garu wanted to stay back in Madras and joined the Madras Medical college. Once he joined his medical studies, it was very challenging for him to pursue learning music.

When Sri Pinakapani garu was in his 4th year of his medical studies he started singing on All India Radio. He used to live in a shared accommodation with two other medical college students and walk almost an hour to his college during his initial college years. Subsequently, he would ride a bicycle to the college. While returning from college one day, a stranger stopped him on the road and asked if he was Pinakapani. Sri Pinakapani confirmed his identity and asked as to why the stranger stopped him – the stranger told him that he listened to Sri Pinakapani's program on radio and that his rendition of the 'Deenarakshana' krithi in Aahiri raaga was very good and wanted to know where he learned it.

Apparently, Sri Pinakapani wouldn't take appreciation at face value and he questioned the stranger as to what he liked about that rendition. The stranger replied that no one in Tamilnadu presented such detail in Aahiri raga, that was the reason he was impressed and wanted to know how he was able to present that detail. Sri Pinakapani garu replied that he listened to 3 separate vidwans present that Krithi, wrote down the notation for each version, and then developed his own version taking portions of the notation from the 3 other vidwans. It seems the stranger was Sri Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar – he used to work in a school as a history teacher but was also an expert in Carnatic music. Sri Pinakapani garu then started learning from Sri Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar. It seems the real Carnatic music training of Sri Pinakapani garu started under the tutelage of Sri Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar.

It seems Sri Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar also served as secretary for one of the local Carnatic music sabhas. It seems many popular vidwans at that time used to line up at Sri Iyengar's home for kacheri opportunities at the sabha. He had a very good analysis and assessment of the styles and capabilities of various Carnatic music exponents. Sri Iyengar was also a veena expert and it seems Sri Pinakapani would jokingly comment that Sri Iyengar sang more 'veena sangathis' than 'vocal

sangathis' in his singing. Whenever he got time, Sri Pinakapani garu would go to Sri Iyengar to learn.

Sri Iyengar would advise Sri Pinakapani as to what are the strong areas of some of the vidwans like Sri Ariyakudi Ramanujam, Sri Semmangudi Srinivas Iyer, Sri Maharajapuram and others are, who is good at what – aalapana, swarakalpana, improvisation and so on and would suggest picking only those specific aspects from each expert. Sri Pinakapani garu learnt from Sri Ranga Ramanuja Iyengar for over 11 years.

In addition to the above learning in Madras, whenever he was in Visakhapatnam for summer holidays, he would go to Vizianagram to learn from Sri Dwaram Venkata Swami Naidu garu. It seems Sri Naidu garu would ask Sri Pinakapani garu to improvise what he would play on the violin and sing that back to him. His medical experience also helped Sri Pinakapani garu to develop his analytical skill to be able to analyse any musician's singing or playing to be able to annotate those renditions thoroughly.

Sri Pinakapani Garu's Musical Life in Kurnool

Sri Pinakapani garu got transferred to Kurnool in 1956 and he considered that his biggest blessing since it gave him a lot of time to do things that he wanted to do. He was able to replicate exactly how some of the other vidwans sang, based on the notation he had made for each of their renditions. But he started to think as to which style of singing should he follow and came to the conclusion that he should develop his own style of thinking. His move to Kurnool helped him a great deal in developing his own style of singing. He would devote at least a couple of hours every day after he came back from the hospital to develop his style of singing.

Looking at all his work of analyzing and singing of various krithis Sri Pinakapani garu's wife thought it would be good to document all his work. So his notations for around 1,100 krithis of various composers – Sri Thyagaraja, Sri Deekshitar and other composers, were written down in around 24 notebooks. Sri Pinakapani garu also composed music for 108 annamacharya keerthanas. While notating, apparently Sri Pinakapani would sing and revise each keertana and would strike down what he sang and wrote 5 or 6 times – he would finalize it only after he thought it cannot be improved anymore. It seems it took him 12 years after his retirement from his medical profession, to complete this exercise of finalizing his own style of rendering each of the 1,100+ keerthanas. TTD (Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam) created 4 volumes of Sri SripadaPinakapani garu's work under the title of Sangeetha Saurabhamu.

All renowned Carnatic music vidwans who follow the practice of singing based on notation, follow Sri Pinakapani garu's notation. Notable amongst such singers are Malladi brothers. Many other experts have written notation for many krithis but most of those are somewhat cursory or high-level; the distinguishing feature of Sri Pinakapani garu's notation was that it was very detailed, including notation for 'anuswaras'. He also composed 6 varnams by himself. He did this work almost like a 'tapas' like a yogi. His family members were afraid of disturbing him and would enter his room only after knocking. When he had nothing more to analyze about singing, his attention



turned towards mridangam, at age of around 96. He wanted to do similar analysis on the works of renowned mridangam vidwans like Mani Aiyer, Trichy Sankaran, Mayapuram Sivaraman and others.

Many renowned musicians were students of Sri Sripada Pinakapani garu – amongst them were Padmabhushan Sri Nookala Chinna Satyanarayana, Sangeeta Kalanidhi Sri Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy, Sri Voleti Venkateswarlu and Sri Srirangam Gopalarathnam. They were the top students of Sri Pinakapani garu. Sri Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy garu learned from Sri Pinakapani garu for almost 10 years staying at Sri Pinakapani garu's home. Sri Pinakapani garu would expect to teach his students at the time of his choosing and the student needs to be available when the Guru is available to teach. Sri Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy garu learnt over 200 krithis from Sri Pinakapani garu. Sri Krishnamoorthy in turn trained the Malladi brothers. Sri Malladi Soori Babu garu, father of the Malladi Brothers was a student of Sri Voleti Venkateswarlu who passed away at an early age. It seems Sri Venkateswarlu garu used to write a two liner letter to Sri Pinakapani garu asking for notation for a particular keerthana, Sri Pinakapani garu would send him a detailed notation and Sri Venkateswarlu garu would sing that keerthana on radio within a couple of days after receiving the notation.

It seems Sri Pinakapani never liked singing to huge audiences – he preferred to sing to a small group of expert musicians. Once when Sri Kameswara Rao garu (Sri Pinakapani's son) complemented to Sri Voleti Venkateswarlu garu that he liked Sri Venkateswarlu garu's singing compared to his father's (Sri Pinakapani garu's) singing, Sri Venkateswarlu garu replied that he and his peers would sing for the audience whereas Sri Pinakapani garu would sing for people like him.

One of Sri Pinakapani garu's closest friends was Sri Dr.Bramhayya Sastry garu – they would occasionally go for a walk on the beaches of Visakhapatnam. Sri Sastry garu had a deep understanding of music but was not a singer. Sri Pinakapani would ask Sri Sastry garu to pick the most difficult raaga and would ask him to sing – they would sing hours going back and forth on that raga on the beach. Likewise, Sri Pinakapani garu would spend an entire day with Sri Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy garu on a particular raaga, while doing shopping, while walking the hilly terrains of Visakhapatnam and so on.

Sri Pinakapani composed music for over 100 Annamayya krithis and he published his music notation for these krithis as a book. He also published a book transliterating his musical journey in a kind of his own autobiography titled 'Sangeetha Yatra'. Unfortunately, copies of this book are not available anywhere except with some of the very close students of Sri Pinakapani. He also wrote a narrative of the 72-melakarta ragamalika composition of Sri Mahavaidyanatha Aiyer, titled 'Mela Raga Malika'. He also wrote a book titled 'Manodhrma Sangeetham' addressing all the 6 aspects of manodharma sangeetham.

Once an Election Commission officer, Smt. Jayanthi Ravi, was in Kurnool and she came to visit Sri Pinakapani garu. She wanted to learn music from Pinakapani garu. He asked her to sing whatever she could – after listening to her, Sri Pinakapani told her that in order for her to learn from him, she would have to unlearn what she knew and that such a process would take a long time. She replied



that she was in Kurnool for 40 days and that she will try and learn as much as she can, during those 40 days. Sri Pinakapani garu was impressed with her sincerity and agreed to teach her. She indeed attended classes diligently for the time she was in Kurnool. Apparently, Smt. Jayanthi Ravi went to become a very senior official in the Government of Gujarat in later years. It seems many musicians used to visit Sri Pinakapani from Madras and they used to call it a ‘Pilgrimage to Pinakapani’.

Conclusion

Dr. Sri Sripada Pinakapani garu’s life in Kurnool enabled him to discover and enhance his own style of music through years of deep analysis and refinement. He was also able to mentor many stalwart musicians such as Sri Nedunuri Krishnmoorthy, Sri Nookala Chinna Satyanaryana, Sri Voleti Venkateswarlu and Sri Maharajapuram Santhanam, each of who went on to become legends themselves in the field of Carnatic music. Sri Pinakapani also published many of his works during the 50+ years he spent in Kurnool. His presence, all of his musical pursuits and the visits of his scholarly disciples to the city, enhanced the stature of Kurnool as a prominent place for Carnatic music.

References:

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