

IFAASD

Souvenir 2024



Sangeeta Achārya

Thiruvaiyaru S.R. Krishnan

Co-Chair of Festival

Sangeeta Achārya Thiruvaiyaru S.R Krishnan is a Vākgèyakāra, Védic scholar, poet, lyricist, composer, journalist, a story writer, and an operatic playwright. Krishnan was trained in Karṇāṭaka Sangītam by his father Gāna-Bhūshaṇam Brahmasri Kumāramangalam Srinivāsa-Rāghavan (KSR or Rāgasri), and by many other legends of the 20th Century including Maharājapuram Viswanātha Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer and G.N. Bala Subramanyam. Krishnan has been performing since 1955 in India, Far East Asia, Europe, Great Britain, and the United States, accompanied by well-known artists many of whom are leading names in the Indian Music world. Krishnan is also a celebrated exponent of “Dakshina-sampradaya-Sankeertanam, Abhang-Sankeertan & Hari-Kathā traditions”, performing these divine formats encompassing music from Hindusthāni and Karnataka-Sangeeta traditions of India. His Gurus for these ancient traditions include Brahmasri Rāgasri, Brahmasri Nāthamuni Nārāyaṇa-Iyengar, Abhang Sirónmañi Nārāyaṇa-Sāstri, and Swāmi Haridoss Giri (renowned as ‘Guruji’) with whom Krishnan had performed since 1959 through Guruji’s Jeevan-samadhi in 1990s. Krishnan’s earliest Opera based on three versions of “Rámāyaṇa”, titled Sitāyāscaritam-Mahat or Triveni-Ramayana” was staged first in 1965, in India. A thespian since youth, Krishnan had performed in the prestigious Kalidas Festivals in Ujjain to play leading roles in many of Kalidas’s famed works. He has hundreds of live recordings and compact discs; some of which are also available, on-line, and also on two YouTube channels (Rāgasri & GuruBhakti).



A disciple of His Holiness Jagadguru Kanchi Paramāchārya (68th Pontiff of the Adi Sankara Order), Krishnan continued training in the Vedas and scriptures in Sanskrit College, Madras under the direct auspices of Paramāchārya. His most recent book, ‘Periyavā Kālaḍiyilirundu’ detailing his personal interactions with on HH Paramāchārya, over a 10-year period, is well received.

Krishnan with his wife Radha and his daughters/disciples, Priya, Harini & Subha (aka ‘Krishnan-Sisters’ in the music world) are all involved in several philanthropic & charitable causes. Krishnan’s performances are mostly, if not all of them, fundraisers for Charities and Philanthropy and for temples; those live recordings supplement the Krishnans' support to charities, Homes for the mentally and physically challenged and hospitals for the underprivileged.

A gold medalist in the 1960s from the University of Madras, India, Krishnan has been a Fellow of the Royal Chartered Institute of Bankers (London) and a Fellow of the Institute of Financial Accountants (London). Krishnan has held top executive positions with several International Banks, in Asia, Europe, Great Britain and the US, and has widely traveled the globe for more than 50 years. He is the founder CEO and Chairmen of several reputed US Fiduciary firms that served as Receivers, Trustees, Regulator, Monitor et al. at the nomination of US Federal and State Agencies, Regulators, Banks, and Foreign Governments. He has served as a United States Trustee and also as the Special Deputy Commissioner of California State for Financial Protection & Innovation.

Can our ancient music tradition continue to remain relevant Sans Bhakti? Karnāṭaka Sangītam as we know (or do not know) Today!

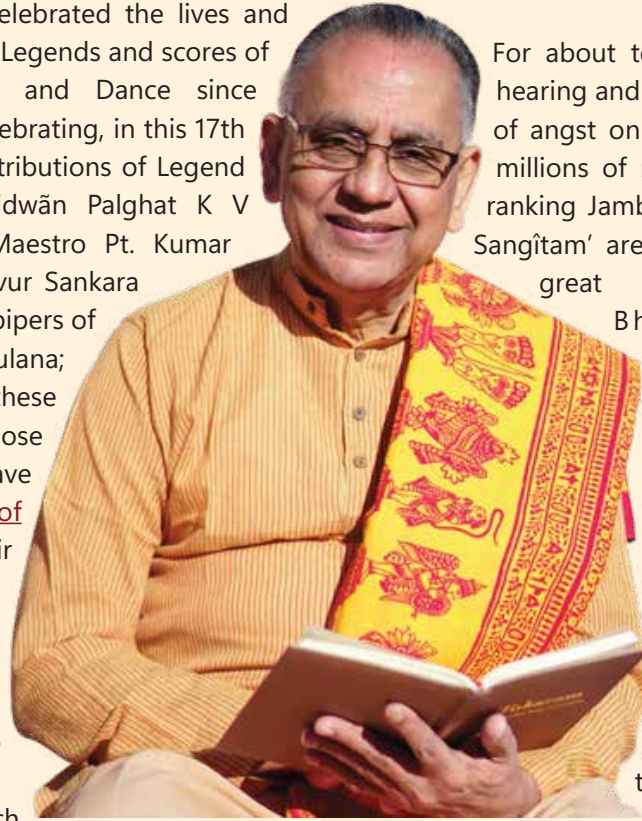
Preamble:

It has been a pleasure to be associated with IFAA-SD (the "Academy") and to have participated in all their annual celebrations of Music and Dance Festivals since 2008, including their 'Youth Festivals'. I have been impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the Academy-founders, and all the (19) Trustees of the IFAA Board, more so for their selfless efforts to nurturing and fostering the exponential growth of this one-of-a-kind organization outside of India ("Bhārat").

The Academy has, so far, celebrated the lives and contributions of a handful of Legends and scores of stalwarts in Indian Music and Dance since Academy's inception; it is celebrating, in this 17th annual festival, the lofty contributions of Legend Pt. Ravi Shankar, Mahā Vidwān Palghat K V Narayanaswamy, Classical Maestro Pt. Kumar Gandharva, Asu-Kavi Thanjavur Sankara Iyer and one of the greatest pipers of our times, Sheik Chinna Moulana; and as always, every one of these legends/stalwarts, like those honored in the past, have propagated [Indian Music of devotion](#) evidenced by their [music soaked in devotion](#).

I chose this subject, which is sensitive, at diverse levels. The subject takes us to difficult discussions and viable solutions most of which are usually skirted since most of the media play the tunes of some popular and powerful personalities. But I am equally aware that this topic is the age-old angst, and I wondered whether I could convey that in one place: hence this article.

• Saint Tyagaraja asked many questions through his songs on this title: 'Sangīta Gnyānamu Bhakti vinā, Sanmārgamu Galadè! (O) manasā? - O Mind! Mere knowledge of music bereft of Bhakti (devotion) will not lead to the right path (of God realization). A few hundred years before him, Purandara Dāsarū asked the same question differently, 'kēlanō hari tālano / tāla mēlagaliddu bhaktiyillada gāna - Will Hari like to hear or bear music without devotion though it has rhythm and good tune?



For about ten years now, I have been hearing and noticing a lot of expressions of angst on this subject, echoed by (a) millions of music-fans, (b) most of the ranking Jambavāns from the 'Karnataka-Sangītam' arena, and (c) by most of the great dancers of Bhāratīya-Sampradāyam (spanning all the major branches of Dance styles of India).

Bhārat, since its Independence (from the pilfering Invaders and corrupt Rulers), has continued to face, even after if not especially more after Independence, more than a country's share of dissenters, religious fanatics, political opportunists, and caste & race-baiters who have been relentlessly pelting stones, physically and verbally, on Dharma (Hindu) Tradition, Gods, Scriptures, Beliefs, and Arts & Literature. Unlike other recent religions or

cult-fanatics, Sanātana-Dharma (the 'Code' or Hinduism) admonishes any form of violence and the true followers have always attempted to quell demonic efforts (of berating our 'Dharma') through intellectual counters, showing the highest level of tolerance and restraint through orderly and nonviolent, yet powerful arguments.

- To cite an example, a film-songwriter from Tamil Nadu festered a controversy on the birth and standing of Hindu Goddess Goda/Andal and on her magnum opus literature, Tiruppāvai (~1,200 years old) - which till today remains a gospel for a few hundred million Hindus. When some of the songwriter's brahmin-bashing cheerleaders from the film world and regional political affiliates attempted to join his shadow-chorus, such attempts were effectively quelled by great Acharyas from Sanatana Dharma, and by millions of Sanātānīs. The dissenters seem an offshoot of the atheist group which have been attempting for a hundred years, in southern India, to fester anti-God sentiments, caste politics, and 'brahmin bashing' as a short cut for quick ascent unto regional political fiefdom. Ironically, as most of you will agree, the same bunch or similar dissenters had never dared to write or talk anything even remotely critical of Christianity or Islam or any prophets or messiahs.

For someone like me, born in pre-Independence-India, emigrated from Homeland some 43+ years ago, and having lived through four continents and visiting 70+ countries, during that period, the aforementioned controversies, pettiness and resulting angst of those affected, were/are not anything new. In context, most of the Americans, right here, will also empathize with my condemnation of racial violence, anti-immigrant rhetoric and removal of the hard-fought freedom of women and all other forms of intimidation witnessed over the last seven years. But majority of the real patriots, reasonable and decent Americans, who love this country have rallied against such racism and misogyny! Human avarice,

racism, casteism, immoral and narcissistic behavior, verbal incitements, and selfishness are not unique to America or India.

- A recent anecdote in that regard is relevant here: a small group of neo-resident Indian Americans attempted to inject caste-politics unto the laws of State of California, through some local unsavory politicians, but got called on their actions, summarily rejected and dumped by the well-meaning Californians.

But something lot closer to the subject, finally, triggered this article.

For about seven years or more, music lovers have been noticing an increasing trend in South India, wherein a handful of musicians have been raising fundamental questions on the established heritage, traditions, foundations, and purpose of Karnataka Sangītam, our south Indian Classical Music system. A small band of south Indian musicians have joined the dissenters to blow dog whistle on irreverent topics which are at best irrelevant 'today' especially **after the death of great musicians who are revered even today, for their stellar contributions, beyond their lifetime.** Also, added accusations on 'brahmins-as-a-community' of monopolizing Karnataka Sangītam, for centuries, is another juicy topic attracting some traction! Some in the media look to fish in such troubled ponds.

An Indian musician stirred the pond, unintended, maybe, a few years ago, through his (monetarily) successful book on Music. The instant fame may have encouraged more such books by the author, creating more readership among the curious and also among the awaiting caste-baiters due to such 'caste/gender' controversies peppered here and there in the book; I am told that the book attracted a lot of young and aspiring students of 'Classical' Karnataka Sangītam, more, due the controversies raised and lot less towards the original purpose of the musical heritage, which I believed was the true intent of the successful author! Less courageous, took to blogs and

exacerbated the controversies by following that successful author's footsteps and offered unsolicited interviews, hoping for similar media hype; all of them aimed the following debates, albeit, in no particular order and the listing here is sporadic.

- Questioning the prowess/stature of honored artists' extraordinary musical contributions by digging up or highlighting unneeded hagiographical questions. Mark Twain said: "He gossips habitually; he lacks the common wisdom to keep still that deadly enemy of man, his own tongue."

- Questioning the age-old reference or adjective of 'Classical' to Karnataka Sangîtam maintaining that 'Carnatic Music' should not be confused with Bhakti Sangîtam or divine classical music.

- Recommending inclusion of Ghāna or 'rap' on to the classical music stages.

The above news items had/have prompted a few more popular (music and film) persona to write blogs or offer interviews on some or all of the above, catching up erroneously on the oft-referred undercurrent of anti-God, anti-brahmin, anti-tradition sentiments which have been a part of the (south Indian) regional politics for more than 100 years. **Regrettably, the net effect was not and is not "the promotion of the ancient tradition of Indian Music."**

Without declaring or announcing as such, but following late E V Ramaswamy Naicker, (the 20th century self-anointed 'social reformer'), Brahmin-bashing has been another easier way adopted by film-persona and a handful of musicians (pitiably only in Tamil Nadu, India) to be 'noticed' and hailed as 'rebels' or egalitarians. We have to applaud here that the benefit that sprung from Ramaswamy Naicker's touted social reform agenda did indeed change the lives of millions of suppressed women of Tamil Nadu.

More painful lament is the accusation that 'Brahmins have waylaid the Carnatic Music' and that they successfully purged all other aspiring musicians, due

to caste-considerations! Sad indeed. This is nothing new; this is the corollary of accusing the hereditary priesthood in a myriad temples who of course are in hand-to-mouth existence! **I wonder whether similar sentiments will dare be expressed loudly against famous actors and actresses in Indian celluloid industry and regional political parties pointing to the generational domination, by heirdoms, for over 65 years.**

Something laughable, however, is that the current day politicians of the South are careful not to blow the aforementioned 'anti-God, anti-Hindu, anti-Brahmin' dog-whistles since the political party or parties of the South are fully aware of the fragile political system and how the (voter) camel's back could be easily broken by such straws, if played openly. That is why, the actors, musicians and other surrogates hoot the horns, every now and then by blogs and books.

I wanted to remove the above section or paragraph after drafting the above, but let it remain, for a painfully compelling reason. My topic and subject-title demanded that I lay the reasons candidly to help hone-in my 'angst' shared by the silent millions.

Background:

Bhārat or Bhāratam, now known as India, is as ancient as its civilization, historically, and the greatest of civilizations as conceded by the greatest of researchers, scholars, historians, philosophers, Indologists, and anthropologists from the Western and Eastern hemispheres. These were settled findings and no longer subject to any debate. They have also reconciled to the time-theory ("Chatur-yuga theory)," since modern science and the eminent researchers have concluded in their Great Collision theory, resulting in the last of the planets and new continents and evolutionary Timestamp conclusions pointing to billions of years. **All these are relevant to our short subject since our mythology (such as Puranas) and mysticism (re: incarnations) also to some extent our belief systems of the oldest Civilization & Code known**

as the 'Sanātana Dharma' – the eternal Code – which unfortunately got christened as "Hindu" by invaders and occupiers and as India for Bhārat.

Indian Music has always been a necessary divine-vehicle for prayers to realize the Supreme Lord from within and its existence conceded for millions of years, from the time of Treta-yuga (as seen from the epic Ramayana) to that of Dvāpara Yuga (as seen from the other epic Mahabharata) and to the current era.

The essential beliefs arising out of our objectification and Interiorization of our Religious Thought gave rise to the 'Code' (Sanātana-Dharma) which encompassed scriptures, both eternal and recent. The four Vedas, the basic scriptures of Sanātana Dharmis," were followed by Upanishads (amplifying scriptures arising out of Vedas) and finally Puranas (further amplifications in anecdotal and simple forms) and Ithihāsās or Epics (such as Ramayana and Mahabharata) which were subjected to extensive analysis and logical research to assign the Timestamp on those occurrences and history. All the above scriptures are, collectively, called Hindu Scriptures (vast and voluminous unlike that of newer religions that came about in the last two millennia); Sanātani Scriptures have talked about every aspect of human evolution, history and civilization including all forms of Arts and Sciences now known to the Humans. Every one of those scriptures highlighted Sankeertanam (our devotional Music) as one of the nine aspects of Bhakti (Devotion).

Confusions and Caveats:

The writer's motive is (1) not to discredit or to critique the popular book or basis for the author's conclusions, (2) nor is an attempt to project a thesis on south Indian music (3) nor for solicitation of any recognition, fame, or reward. The writer, a journalist for over 60 years, is not afraid of criticisms since he has not been in any popularity contest, all his life! The writer does not claim expertise in musicology nor claim to be a commercial performer nor a teacher (for money) of the ancient systems of Indian Music. Nevertheless, for

context, the writer did undergo formal training in the history and practice of Karnataka-Sangītam and has been performing for more than 60 years in four continents (always and only) for philanthropy, charity, and non-monetary causes; the same complex south Indian Music system. Now hardly 10% of the Indians may be curious to learn of the timing or what/why of such nomenclature change into 'Carnatic' Music! Since many of us seem to like the christening of Indian cities, monuments, and Art-forms by our erstwhile foreign rulers, (especially the English but including slave kings and invading Moghuls), "Carnatic Music" and Kutcheri (or Kaccheri) have come to stay and regrettably, most of our youngsters of Indian-origin seem unaware of such reasons.

World Music over the last 400 years as a means to reach God, the Almighty!

As I said earlier, this is not meant to be a treatise on global Music and/or antiquity. But for those who want to quote the western media, authors, and musicians to help them delink our classical music from Devotion, some of my observations, here, may be useful, especially if this article is patiently read in full by the readers, especially by youngsters.

One of my musician friends from France, Professor Chris Chater (who also taught music in American School of Paris) gave me in 1984 (a set of 3) vinyl-Lp's, Yo-Yo-Ma's "J.S.Bach: the six Unaccompanied Cello Suites". I hardly knew the basics of Western Music system then and this gift kindled my curiosity towards that and also made me a fan of Yo-Yo-Ma. That led me to read on 'J.S. Bach,' the world-famous German composer and musician composing songs on the Bible (from the tail-end of the Baroque period). Since Bach's music stands, even after 300+ years, at the pinnacle of Western civilization, I was heartened to read that most, if not all, of 'Bach' was based on spirituality. Later in the same year, I was fortunate to attend a Bach Retrospective in Vienna, Austria and the brochure given as part of the program was a real revelation for me! This program guide was peppered

with quotes from many other musical Greats highlighting that all such Greats were engulfed in Spiritual Consciousness and Music was their medium towards Inner Search & Realization!

Igor Stravinsky (19th CE) said, "Music praises God; Music is better able to praise HIM than building of a Church with all its ornate décor; in fact, Music is the Church's greatest Ornament'.

Ludwig Van Beethoven (18th CE), the revered composer, wrote, "Music is the mediator between 'Intellectual and Sensuous' – "the one Spiritual entrance into the higher world (easily)".

A thousand Indian saints/scholars have stated similar sentiments in various Indian languages with greater emphasis; but there is a reason, here, for selecting those foreign personalities, since many of the literate Indians of the yester-years may not have known of Bhagavad Gita and Hitopadesam until Sir Charles Wilkins (1750-1836) wrote commentaries on them. We needed a Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835) or Georg Friedrich Hegel (1772-1829) or Professor Max Müller to appreciate 'Sanskrit and Sacred Books of the East'.

While all those Indologists were humble and decent enough to acknowledge their newfound knowledge of the Dharma scriptures to the greatest of the Sanskrit scholars and scriptural teachers of the 18th and 19th Centuries - most of whom perished in obscurity and poverty. Hence my unshakeable views on the inseparability of Classical music from Spirituality.

The profound motto of Smithsonian is "Music and spirituality are intricately related, with spirituality often being the inspiration for the creation of music, and music so often creating the desired atmosphere for a

spiritual occasion."

This is a vast topic in itself; but suffices to say that 'Scientists, philosophers, poets, writers and artists of all kinds, Shakespeare to Einstein and Homer to Aristotle to Schoenberg – all agreed on one thing; Music is transcendental, not to be trampled or cheapened. Utilizing Music for entertainment is not a sin but berating the real purpose of Music is indeed the greatest of Sins.

Ancient Bharatiya Sangîtam and origins of Indian Music:

Simply put, Music is humanly organized Sound, made for the purpose of emotional expression to realize the Inner soul or power! The theory of Indian 'Classical' Music is well grounded in the concept of Nāda-Brahman or Shabda-Brahman linked to the eternal Vedic Religion. "Lókó Binna Ruchihi (different people, different tastes)." I have no disagreements with anyone using the sounds of Music to other forms of emotional expressions in and around, through Films, stage shows or for other forms of entertainment per se, changing genres of presentations extensively. In fact, I enjoy any and all such! What bothers is to muddy the word 'Classical' and attempt to dissociate Karnataka Sangîtam from Divinity or Devotion!

"apara-Brahman (the Ultimate)" highlighted by Māndûkya-Upanishad is indeed Shabda-Brahman which Brihadāraṇyaka-Upanishad (4.1.2) emphasized; Pūrva-Mîmāṃsa in Vedic texts (critical investigation) deals with Shabda Brahman and Vedanta deals with Parama-Brahman (the Ultimate or Cosmic Excellence). Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita (6.44): pūrvābhyāsena tenaiva - hriyate hy avaśo 'pi saḥ / jijñāsur api yogasya - śabda-brahmātivartate –

¹ Kutcheri word was extensively used by Moghul rulers in 17th to 19th centuries to denote an assembly of plaintiffs and defendants, meant for the 'dispute resolution'. Maratha rulers and kings in Gujarat also used this name to denote the court of the Kings and Village and Tehsil courts for the same purpose. Sadly, except that some musicians of south Indian music world seem to resolve their (personal) disputes on the performance platform, there is no justifiable reason to use that word for 'Karnataka Sangîtam or any music Concert'.

[Shabda Brahman here has been used to mean Vedic injunctions. Śabdabrahman represents the “mystic syllable Om,” as retold in the Śivapurāṇa (2.1.8)

sparśas tasyābhavaj jīvaḥ svarō deha udāhṛta /
ūṣhmāṇam indriyāṇy āhur/
antaḥ-sthā balam ātmanaḥ svarāḥ sapta vihāreṇa /
bhavanti sma prajāpateḥ

(The creator) Brahmā's soul was manifested as the touch alphabets, his body as the vowels, his senses as the sibilant alphabets, his strength as the intermediate alphabets and his activities as the seven notes of music.

This was followed by Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad (Upadèsam #1) mentions the solfa notes/letters, sa ri ga ma pa dh & ni; reiterating that citizens of Bhāratam were the earliest of human race to think in terms of absolute music.

I do not want this exercise to be misinterpreted as belonging to the blind faith which has no logical or scientific explanation.

- Just as a speck of a tree sprouting from its seed to the huge development of a big tree, (progressive) change is inevitable in this world of time-space-causation.

- Indian Music had also developed in the same process, through different strata of evolution, in different periods, primitive, prehistoric, Vedic, classical, medieval, and modern. This change will not stop here but will move forward again getting constantly modified.

- But questioning or rewriting ‘Classicism or Classical’ is not and can never be considered forward movement.

The greatest of scholars have conceded that the Vedic Music, Sāmagāna, helped the progress of the Gāndharva-gāna (this gāna should not be confused with the folk Ghāna lately recommended by some for inclusion on classical concert stages!); Gāndharva-gāna, in turn, got replaced by the

formalized regional or dèsi Sangîtam, yet classical, with new nomenclatures and forms. I too believe like many million fans of music globally, that modifications, alterations, reconstructions, and readjustments should always be welcomed, so as to be aiding and assisting in drawing inspiration from the glorious heritage of past consciousness of preserving the pristine ideal and for cause of the Indian Music, but not with a view to erasing the foundational thought and time-tested-conclusions.

To reiterate, like a parrot, this is not a dissertation on Musicology; but this much is felt essential to be said that the earliest available and scripted work on Indian music, the solfa system and the profound origin from Sama-Veda is ‘Nāradīya Siksha’ averred to date 300-500 BCE. This is an extensive treatise, and its earliest publication in Sanskrit in India dates back to the 19th century. But its most significant contribution that has vitalized Indian Music is that of aligning the Vaidika (Sama) and the Laukika (worldly) Sangîtam; and, rearranging the Sama Svarās of the descending order into ascending order of the Laukika Svarās as known today. Nevertheless, the powerful undercurrent of this foundational work is divinity and devotional expression as a means to the stated goal of self-realization.

There are 41 important works on the science of Music starting from Sage Narada or Sage Bharata, to Govindacharya – all of which stress and highlight that Classical music based on and for devotion (bhakti) since they are inseparable.

This above treatise was followed by Sage Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra (~500 BCE to 100 CE), the notable ancient encyclopedic treatise which influenced Music, dance, and literary traditions in India, as we know today, with serious emphasis on aesthetic ‘Rasa’ theory, highlighting the primary goal of transporting a practicing individual in any audience into another parallel reality of wonder and making him or her

experience the essence of their own consciousness to reflect spiritual and moral inquiries and pursuits.

Indians were equally blessed to have Matanga (5th/7th CE) who gave us a clear musical treatise, Brihadessi, a compilation of musical traditions in various regions distinguished between classical music (Mārga Sangeet) and folk music (Desi Sangeet). One of the common differences is that the former was sung in Sanskrit and would mostly turn out to be prayers and chants and had to adhere to rigid structures and rules. The latter was composed in Prākṛit, sung by locales and was flexible in composition and also in grammar; the former classified as 'classical' and the later as 'folk.' It does not mean that folk lacked divinity or was not used for devotional music!

This should clarify that 'if the current day 'Karnataka Sangītam' or 'Carnatic Kutcheri' – were to be addressed as 'Classical' – it should stay focused on the divine and devotional elements as per fundamental tenets of our ancient Sangītam.

If a popular performer wants to impress the 'crowd,' otherwise, why not advertise the concert as 'non-classical,' or 'Ghāna' or 'Light' or 'filmy' or 'folk' or 'fusion' or anything else. Such innovators (or performers) have their fans to cheer them up, no matter whatever is offered!

Switching back to the subject on origins & time periods,

From Ancient to Medieval period (500-1500 CE), this period reaped the benefits of Śāṅgadeva's Sangeeta-Ratnakara (13th CE) written at a time when the Persian/Moghul influence started dominating in India and also at a time when Bharatīya Sangītam was integrated before it was branched into Hindustani and Karnataka Sangītam [practiced in the expansive southern region encompassing what became known as the states of 'Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra and Malayāla dēsams'].

- [another tidbit: The world-famous 'Ramtanu Misra' who got re-named 'Tansen Pandey' and finally Mian Tansen in the Mughal Emperor Akbar's court was one of the 'navratans' (nine gems) treated with utmost reverence by Emperor Akbar because of his Music. Tansen sang in temples and also in Akbar's Court to the delight of lords and commoners, alike, and none of the historians seemed to have recorded any mention of the 'father of modern Hindusthāni Music' visiting mosques or mausoleums to sing the ancient Indian Music].

The modern period of Music (1501 CE to today) is studied under three divisions:

- (1) Sangita- Pitāmahā Purandara Dasa to Saint Tyagaraja.
- (2) The era of Tyagaraja when Adhūnika (modern) Sangīta attained its zenith and
- (3) post-Tyagaraja times. South Indian Classical Music became universally popular thanks to the lyrical content which today remains the backbone for the growth of exponential appreciation.

Our current focus is the fate and state of Karnataka Sangītam since the advent of the 20th century, as part of post-Tyagaraja times.

Instrumental Music, Lyrical content and Spirituality:

- In the 1980s, I used to travel frequently in the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and of course the United States. I always enjoyed listening to African Drums since my first exposure to a Drums of Passion concert in New Orleans in the first Mardi Gras - 1978. I had no clue then that the Drummer Babatunde Olatunji was already a phenomenon in the US for more than 20 years! I attended per chance another of his sensational (homecoming) performance in Lagos, Nigeria in 1984 seated in the front row thanks to the courtesy of some top Nigerian governmental

officials then and even got introduced to him! Babatunde was an expert in djembe, percussion and of course the Drums. Relinquishing the offer to become a Chieftain in Lagos (offered in the footsteps of his father), he dedicated his life and mission to being an educator, and a social activist with focus on philanthropy. He became a sensation amidst Jazz musicians by infusing Nigerian rhythms with Ghanaian and Afro-Caribbean traditions. He was a close confidante of Rev. Martin Luther King and became more famous when the erstwhile Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev took off his shoes on the floor of the UN General Assembly just to dance with Babatunde because of his spiritual beliefs. In a famous interview with the media, Olatunji said that he connected with his elders and forefathers and God through his Music since Music is divine and that his jazz lyrics in Ogu and Yoruba languages were in praise of God!

- The western world of Music mourned the death of Super-drummer Steve Berrios about ten years ago. The American Jazz drummer was among the most innovative musicians to fuse Afro-Caribbean Drums with vocal jazz. Berrios had an impressive career, featuring work with the band of legendary Mongo Santamaría, jazz legend Max Roach, and Latin-jazz pioneer Tito Puente. When asked in one of the famous interviews, he said, 'my music is not complete without spiritual expressions verbal or

otherwise.'

My team (and I have) had the privilege of performing (for about 4 ½ hours) under the patronage of Bharat Ratna Pt. Ravi Shankar, the Legend, recovering then from a major surgery. During the intermission, Panditji came to the green room to bless each one of us, and we wondered whether due to his poor health, he was planning to leave then and hence came during the intermission; but, to our ecstasy, he stayed through the entire program and also remained with the team for quite some time after the program for photo shoots and individual blessings.

We felt divinely blessed when he said that his 'experience of the program was spiritual' and that the program was rightly titled 'Bhakti Sangeet' (encompassing pearls from two dozen saintly composers, in nine languages, with anecdotes as interludes all about Bhakti as envisioned by the respective composers). He repeated some of his oft-repeated comments (quoted in the Guardian, Times, Le Monde, Der Spiegel et al. in prior decades):

Quotes:

- "The message I'm trying to get through is that our music is very sacred to us and is not meant for people who are addicts, or who misbehave, because it is a music which has been handed down from a



profound religious background for our listeners."

- "If one hears our music without any external intoxication, one does get the feeling of really being intoxicated inward. That is the beauty of our spiritual music. It builds up to that pitch. We don't believe in the extra, or the other stimulus taken, and that's what I'm trying my best to make the young people to understand."
- "Many people, especially young people, have started listening to sitar since George Harrison, one of the Beatles, became my disciple. His attitude toward our music is very sincere. He is very humble and his love for India and our philosophy especially spiritual values of our music is something outstanding...; our music has had many developments made on it over the centuries. It has got the tremendously spiritual, the tranquil mood, which also drops into romantic, very playful and joyous."

Another tidbit: One budding musician, whose 'bowing' techniques drew great crowds, years ago, whose brisk melodies - often times appreciated as frenzied electronic music - enchanted select audience, albeit for a short time; but once he started announcing that he did not need a Tyagaraja or any composer to help showcase his instrumental prowess and that simple solfas with his one-line lyrical flowing through his string instrument were sufficient to make the listener enjoy music and ecstatic! As always, there were agitated protests from offended music fans, while some wannabe instrumentalists seemed impressed by such pronouncements. But the backlash was such a powerful feedback that this musician had to retreat to Tyagaraja and other divine composers so that he could once again recapture his mainstream fans, but, through the established lyrical-musical compositions of eminent 'sāhitya-kartās.'

Musical forms and Varieties:

Karnataka Sangītam is rich in musical forms, say, with as much as fifty varieties of them. Those forms encompass 'sacred music,' 'art music,' dance music,

opera music, folk music et.al., of various regions of India and ironically accommodated even 'gamana-gitams' (or military music). Sāhityams of great Vāggeyakārās (i.e., composer of music for his own text or lyrics) have stood the test of times, becoming benchmarks, with authentic musical & lyrical grammar and possessing independent merit as devotional poetry; once again, the list is long with Saint Tyagaraja, Mudduswami Dikshitar, Syama Sastri, Gopalakrishna Bharati and a hundred other divine composers/Vāggeyakārās who followed them.

- Here again, the latest irony is that a handful of musicians have started giving interviews that "their" handling of yester-years' Vāggeyakārās' lyrics will henceforth become the new gold standards since these are now being 'recorded for posterity and appreciated as original' as opposed to the versions of yesteryear stalwarts whose style of renditions of those sāhityams & sangatīs cannot be accepted as the 'versions attributable to Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and the like'. This is sad indeed!

Also, in the case of many minor composers, the sāhityams are either common place or consist of doxologies made from Puranas.

'Music must please,' wrote Professor Sambamoorthy! A composition which is a mere jugglery of musical phrases or high-speed solfa trains may appease some listeners for some time, but cannot last long; hence will lose appeal, very soon; whereas powerful poetry infused into structured grammar of music will last forever and Tyagaraja is again the gold standard to exemplify this statement!

To quote Sambamoorthy again, "The eternal and universal law in music is 'Survival of the Beautiful" in the realm of Lakshya or musical compositions and Survival of the Useful in the realm of Lakshana or musicology.

Why do we need Bhakti/Devotion to delineate our Classical Music?

Sangita Pitamaha Sri Purandara Dasa, who is one of the modern-day founders of Karnataka Sangītam answers this, direct. As we saw earlier, mythology and mysticism are interwoven in our belief system. There is widespread belief that the Nada-Chakravarti, Sage Narada himself descended down in this last yuga (Kali-Yuga) as Purandara Dasa.

kèlanó hari tālano / tāla mèlagaliddu bhaktiyillada
gāna [pa]
tambûri modalāda akhila vādyagaliddu kombu kōlalu
dhvani svaragaliddu
tumburu nāradara gāna kēluva hari nambalāra ee
dhambakada kûgāTa [1]
nānā bagēya rāga bhāva tilidu svara jnāna
manódharma jātiyiddu
dānavāriya divya nāma rahitavāda hīna sangīta
sāhityakkè manavittu [2]
aDigaDigānanda bāshpa pulakadinda naDè nuDigè
shrī hariyènnuta
drDha bhaktaranu kûDi hari kīrtanè pāDi kaDègè
purandara viTTalanèndarè kēlva [3]

- Will Hari like to hear or bear music without devotion though it has rhythm and good tune?
- There may be Tambura (drone) and many instruments like flute. Lord Hari listens to divine singers Narada and Tumburu. He does not enjoy loud and showy music exhibiting pride.
- Hari does not heartily listen to music bereft of any divine purpose even if that music is rendered in great Ragas, musical notes, and excellent improvisation.
- Those who sing the glory of Lord Hari along with other ardent devotees immersed in devotion, please him. Only such music reaches Purandara Vitthala.

In fact, Bhakti through disciplined music was

highlighted by "Sage Yagnavalkya in his Smriti"
Vīṇā vādana tatvagya: sruti jāti viṣārada: tālagyāśca
prayāsēna moksha mārgam sa gaccati [Y.S: 3.115]

"One who is versed in Veena play, one who is an adept in the varieties of notes and one who is an adept in tala, attains salvation without effort."

Tyagaraja (18thCE), Purandara-reborn, raised the power question, relevant even/more today!

Mókshamu galadā bhuviló Jīvan-muktulu kāni
vāraluku sākshātkāra nee sad-bhakti-sangeeta Jnana
viheenulaku-Mókshamu galadā?

Is it possible for any but the realized souls to attain salvation? Is it possible for one who is devoid of real devotion and knowledge of divine music (to attain salvation)?

[Well, I could be confronted by a sceptic, 'who wants salvation?'].

Tyagaraja was a great philosopher propounding "Nāda-Yoga" or the 'Gāna-Yoga'.

Nevertheless, he raised many such questions with varying expressions, more colorfully in two dozen kritīs and operas.

Is the dilution and separation of Classical music from spirituality deliberate or such a situation happened over time due to other causes? Let us look at some of the causes!

It was easy for Tyagaraja swami to ask 'Nidhi tsāla sukhamā...Rāma-sannidhi tsāla sukhamā? and thus refused royal patronage and demands and remained content living saintly.

It was easy for Mudduswami Dikshita to sing, "Hiraṇmayīm lakshmīm sadā bhajāmi hīna mānavāSrayam tyajāmi" and turn down wealth! Is it possible to do such now when survival depends on minimum resources for self and family?

I am empathetic to the fact that not all performing musicians can afford to perform 'free' or dictate terms to the various music organizations for conditions of

performing engagements; also, not every music teacher, who relies on teaching as the sole profession, can afford to teach for 'free', since their economic situation cannot be conducive, but yet can be sincere in their efforts to impart Music with divinity and great devotion.

But those who are affluent and self-sufficient and who can afford to perform free and teach free should consider that as privilege to do so 'to showcase the greatness of Karnataka Sangîtam to large audiences who cannot afford to spend money, but eager to enjoy such'; and also teach 'for free' the underprivileged irrespective of caste or other considerations, but certainly not for media attention or limelight!

Before I conclude the never-ending quest for an answer to the topic, let me share some of the observations made by my venerable teachers – Parama-guru Paramāchārya, my Adi-guru (my father) and three other legends - (some 60 years ago) and by several senior musicians over the last 20 years or more, about the progressive decline in devotional quality of Karnataka Sangîtam and hence their angst. My quoting them here, may neither appear sequential nor cohesive, but a discerning reader can at best gather the sentiments and a serious musician or a student may empathize with most of these observations offered here with no hidden agenda.

With massive explosion of virtual gurus and virtual students learning over the faltering Internet stratosphere, music sessions for 45 to 60 minutes are often not one-on-one basis and not a Guru-Sishya direct interaction; if a cluster of students of varying (family) music-background or knowledge and varying absorption capacities are grouped for 'over-the-air' learning, the teachers, despite some of them attempting serious individual attention over their wards, may end up reconciling with the available group for many considerations better not highlighted here. This phenomenon causes avoidable heartaches

for the teachers (often bringing disrepute), confusion for the taught and helplessness with the parents, some of which are listed below; amidst the rat-race, lack of time and geographical and communication disadvantages, the real "study of our ancient music tradition" is either slowly slipping or becoming non-existent during the formative years of a student's 'abhyāsa-kālam'.

- Most of the popular musicians, especially those in high demand, seem to have become only practicians (or practitioners), with some of them downgrading to "parroting" with limited or repeat repertoire running from one venue to the other, studios to stages or countries! I hasten to empathize that one should make hay when Sun shines!
- The misunderstanding fostered over the decades that music is "only gained by practice," stunts the real growth of a musician. Concurrent studies of the theory, history and the background of the lyrics fused with music are as essential as gaining practical/performing mastery as a vocalist or as an instrumentalist.
- The overall decline in the quality of present-day Indian music (with some exceptions) is due the decline in the study of the "Shastra of music," languages of compositions and diction and meaning.
- A focus unto all of the above and especially the Shastra of Music brings Bhakti to the forefront and makes the learning a humbling and holistic exercise.
- Some of my Gurus were lot more empathetic to admit that due to the import of hundreds of Persian and Muslim musicians from the 16th to 18th centuries and the resulting implosion, the study of our Śāstrās or the theory of our own music practically seized, the primary reason being that the Śāstrās are in Sanskrit and many of the performing and teaching musicians were ignorant of this "Deva-bhāsha". This started the trend of discounting the fundamental rule to perforce maintain that there was/is no practical utility in the study of the Śāstrās of Music. The above serious blows and missteps over 300+ years almost wiped out the

original music in the North to be substituted by a system that became lopsided and distorted over the centuries.

- South was not “firewalled” either, from this sad development. Parrot-like learning from the voice of one Guru to his disciple led to the gradual changing and distortion of the various compositions, sangatîs and rendition styles as well. No human instrument is perfect, and no Guru can transmit to his disciple exactly what he knew and impart that hundred per cent appropriately. If the Guru also lacked time and effort to learn the Śāstrās and his teaching and style are mimicked by his students without foundational knowledge, the resulting lineage of students will also be flawed with little or no foundation.
- The course correction for this sad state of affairs should come from (a) the innate capacity of the disciple, physically and mentally, to assimilate whatever has been taught vocally, as the most important factor in any such transmission; (b) the student should ask for and (if not possible to obtain from the teacher), at least make self-efforts to refer to books and digital libraries of Shastra which fortunately are available in plenty thanks to the explosion of technology in the last 20 years in particular!

Question: “why did the original shine, gravity or greatness of a rare composition is lost in the urgent generation of today?” There appear many causes for this decline.

- As the mental and physical potential of every human being differs from the others, it is sad but true that every disciple may drop some of the finer points of his/her Guru’s teaching however exceptional the Guru may be!
- In the last five to six generations, the above phenomenon resulted in considerable changes in the original compositions, especially due the rendering techniques since both the Guru and the Sishya often lacked the ‘reference point.’ This would not have happened if the practical learning had been

augmented by the study of Shastra and the outline of sangatîs in some form of notation. I had extensive discussions with the trend-setter, internationally honored/acclaimed Professor T. Viswanathan who trained absolute novices into some of the greatest of musicians – at least a hundred of them – with the dedication unmatched often! He was a proponent of this method of teaching.

- Nevertheless, “Karnataka Sangîtam with the help of Notations’ has always been a contentious subject; there is no absolute or perfect answer for “how to strike a balance (between notational and non-notational vocal training)” and only eminent and sincere Gurus have to produce delicately balanced solutions tailored to individual students and circumstances including on-line-mass teaching. Again, case in point here is Dr. T Viswa.
- Finally, the individual student, on his own, should take serious interest in the study of history and theory of music as part of the Abhyāsa if a formal progress is the goal.

Other aspects that limit qualitative growth of new generation of musicians relative to the vast student population around the globe – some statistics as well:

India’s official global estimates of NRIs and PIOs aggregated to 33 million recently. Of these, about 8 million belong to the white-collar (if not fairly affluent) families and per available estimates, about 10% (800,000) of them are music (and dance) students in the global villages (in 160 countries) learning one form or the other of the Indian music systems and/or one of the five forms of the famous dance systems of India. These numbers may appear to be hyperbole but if one starts counting seriously from one’s own hometown if a serious one has some idea of your hometown/county/State/country’s composition of the ethnic Indians! I learn that lately most of the music students are ‘online or virtual students’ awaiting their virtual Gurus to visit-in-person at least once in a while or for the students to be ferried to Indian Cities to

meet their (respective) Gurus, 'annually' at least once. This phenomenon has grown exponentially since the Covid lock down and even after reverting to normal times, this on-line model seems to be the favorite model!

The explosion of passion to learn our traditional music and the resulting growth are heartwarming but 90% of the new crop does not seem to 'graduate' or come to the Prime market. Some of the reasons for such disappointments were previously stated and some are attributable to the parents and guardians of the students who have minimal if not little background of Indian Music and in particular about Karnataka Sangîtam and the minimum sacrifices to learn such an ancient music.

Here are some suggestions to consider, to correct the above imbalance:

- The students and their parents should attend any and all music/dance concerts that come to their hometown or to their neighborhood. Such attendance has to become a mandatory part of abhyāsa! "Watching" a performer on stage, gives the eager student incomparable education of 'what/how to do and what not to do.' The ancillary benefit is that the committed students become committed audiences and vice versa – assuring a laudable audience at all times for all performers!
- Most of the parents of the aspiring students want to perform the 'arangetram' through a timetable tailored to their own personal reasons, unmindful of what the 'genuine teacher' feels about the learning and absorption capacities of the students.
- There is fundamental lack of understanding (amidst the majority of parents and hence the students that Indian Music, especially, Karnataka Sangîtam') about the Sahitya-based Sangîtam interlaced with Bhakti and the established tradition and facts that simple learning of Raga-delineations and solfa patterns are as important if not less important than the Lyrical expressions ('bhāva')

coupled with an understanding of meaning, language, and the composer and the background of each of those lyrics.

- Thus, only an exceedingly small percentage of the new crop stand and survive the highly competitive neo-music-market.

The blind copying and parroting of a small number of compositions without any background (explained above) or without study of śāstrās have brought present-day music to a mechanical learning process. Eccentric mannerisms, stage-stunts and quixotic distortions including attire are copied by the aspiring students, as part of the 'emulation of the teacher.'

The object of music is to please, and to take the listener to a tranquil state through 'devotion.' That motto is slowly fading. Acrobatics have gained prominence, and occasional applaud for an abbreviated time cannot sustain any such growth. Already, the music concerts in southern India (about 2,800 stage performances packed within a span of 60 days in one city within a radius of 30 miles) beg for minimum audience and only family members and friends are forced to attend – except for a handful of popular musicians, often for varied reasons. Sadly, the young ambitious performer gets disheartened with such poor audience (of 25-50 people, including family) and is ready to drop out; this forms the huge percentage of dropouts.

Epilogue:

A sizable number of short-sighted musicians (north and south) who have only a narrow vision of goals seem concerned only with and for themselves or for the small coterie around them and do not seem to realize that they are not helping in the growth or development of quality music, the emphasis being on 'quality.' Unless we all collectively shed the eccentricities and acrobatics that have crept in, though may seem unintended, and demand more pleasant, more spiritual and more soul-filling music,

given the exponentially huge distractions of the fast-paced world, with technology providing the double-edged sword, attracting committed genuine listeners to the enjoyment of musical art will become an uphill exercise. Instead of constant complaining that 'technology' and streaming devices and free YouTube channels have waylaid the in-person concerts and pushed the conventional concerts to the empty-hall-syndrome, the great musicians – if they are really committed – should do everything towards educating the audience and their students, positively, and aim lofty to offer the best; at least start from something by putting all your heads together. Stop using the concert platforms for promoting controversial views about temples, worships, and divine music.

The music organizations like the Academy-IFAA bear a huge burden to make it right, starting from the choice of performers and effective showcasing of the genuine musicians who have the power to influence the next generations. This vision should be shared by real musicians whose real agenda is promoting and fostering a divine music through a generation keen on learning for the right reasons.

dharma eva hato hanti dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ tasmād dharmo na hantavyo mā no dharmo hato'vadhī
[MB:3.313.128]

[Dharmaputra to Yaksha king in Vanaparva of the epic, Mahābhārat]

[one who (attempts to) destroy "virtue" gets destroyed. And one that preserves it is preserved. I, therefore, do not sacrifice virtue, considering that if destroyed, it will destroy us].

Thiruvaiyaru S R Krishnan

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