THANKS THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES FOR THEIR CONTINUED
FINANCIAL SUPPORT OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS

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SRUTI RANJANI 2006
SPECIAL EDITION
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF MUSIC AND DANCE

A SRUTI Publication of
The India Music & Dance Society
Volume 18
Greater Delaware Valley
December 2006
## CONTENTS

1. Letters
   1.1 Governor of Pennsylvania 3
   1.2 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts 4
   1.3 SRUTI 2006 Board 5
   1.4 Library Committee 6

2. Reflections on SRUTI—Letters from Past Presidents
   2.1. Mani Subramanian (1986-1987) 7
   2.2. P. Swaminathan (1991-1992) 7
   2.3. Dinakar Subramanian (1996-1997) 8
   2.5. Prabhakar Chitrapu (2004-2005) 9

3. Recent Concert Reviews
   3.1. Sudha Raghunathan 10
   3.2. Mahanjaniram Ramachandran 12
   3.3. Priyadarshini Govind 13

4. Selected SRUTI Articles from the past 20 years
   4.1. SRUTI
      4.1.1 SRUTI: Five Years and Growing—T.S. Venkataraman (1991) 14
      4.1.3 SRUTI Sthapana—T.N. Balu (1996) 18
      4.1.4 SRUTI: 20 Years and Growing (2006) 19
   4.2. Music
      4.2.1 Nada Sudha Tarangini—Nanduri Krishnamurthy (1992) 21
      4.2.2 On the Origins and Early History of the Sitar—Allyn Miner (2000) 22
      4.2.3 Differences between Western Classical and Carnatic Music—Inani Prabhakar (2002) 25
      4.2.4 The Musical Works of Thyagaraja—Prabhakar Chitrapu (2003) 26
   4.3. Dance
      4.3.1 A Conversation with Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari—Arundhati PrabhaShanker (1991) 35
      4.3.2 Place of Music in Dance—Ramasubramaniam (1992) 38
      4.3.3 Evolution of Kalakshetra Style—Vasantha Vedan (1996) 39
      4.3.4 Classical Dance Art Forms—Kala Menon (2004) 41
   4.4. Profiles
      4.4.1 Is Thyagaraja Really Great?—Rasikan (1990) 44
      4.4.2 Understanding Thyagaraja’s Niche in Society—W. Jackson 45
      4.4.3 Kshetrayya—Ari Sitaramayy (1992) 49
      4.4.4 She Followed A Dream; The Life of Bangalore Nagananthamma—H.Y. Rajagopal (1996) 51
      4.4.5 R.K. Srikrishna; A Profile—Viji Swaminathan (1996) 54
      4.4.6 Some Thoughts on Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer—T. Sarada and T. Parasarad (2003) 56
   4.5. General
      4.5.1 Thaamudham Enaaya? Composition by J. Shivakuma (1991) 59
      4.5.2 Practical Practice—Chitraveena Ravikiran (1997) 60
      4.5.3 Creativity Par Excellence, An Exercise in Manodharma (2003) 61

5. First SRUTI Flyer 62

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**ARTISTS:**

Dr. M. L. Vasanthakumari, popularly known as MLV, has been at the forefront of carnatic music world for over three decades. A leading deciple of the legendary musician, late G.N. BALASUBRAMANIAM (GNB), MLV has established an individual style of singing. Her music is marked by controlled effervescence and spacious imagination. With a large repertoire of PURANDARA DASA’s kirtans, she has been largely responsible for the popularization of the great saint’s compositions.

MLV has received numerous awards including the Padma Bhushan from the Government of India and the coveted SANGITA KALANIDHI from the prestigious Music Academy of Madras.

Kumari Kanyakumari, a disciple of M. CHANDRASEKHARAN, is a leading South Indian Violinist. She has accompanied many leading South Indian musicians and also given solo concerts.

Vidwan Ramnad Raghavan teaches mridangam at the Cleveland Oberlin College and the Cleveland State College. He has also been teaching mridangam at the S.V. Temple Pittsburgh and was recently awarded the Asthana Vinodham title at the S.V. Temple.

Vocal support to MLV is provided by Smt. Meena Subramaniam, who has traveled extensively to many countries with MLV.

**DIRECTIONS TO CONGREGATION BETH-EL PA XON HOLLOW ROAD BROOMALL PA:**

1. Traveling South on PA Rte 320 (Sproul Road) drive about 1.5 miles after intersection with PA Rte 3, to Paxton Hollow Road. Turn right on Paxton Hollow Road. Congregation Beth-El is less than 0.25 mile on your left. Parking is on the rear of the building.

2. Traveling North on PA Rte 320, drive about 1.5 miles after intersection with Rte. 1, turn right on Paxton Hollow Road immediately after Lawrence Park Shopping Center. Follow directions in (1).

3. Traveling West on PA Rte 3 (West Chester Pike), turn left on Lawrence Road immediately after Havertford Memorial Hospital (to your left). Park to your right on Lawrence Road. Lawrence Road ends on Sproul Road (PA Rte 320). Turn right on Sproul Road and immediate left on Paxton Hollow Road. Follow directions in (1).

4. Traveling East on PA Rte 3 (West Chester Pike), turn right on Springfield Road (Bradleys on your right). Springfield Road joins Sproul Road (PA Rte 320). Follow directions in (1).

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We look forward to seeing you at the concert. Thanks.
Sruti Ranjani, 2006

THE INDIA MUSIC AND DANCE SOCIETY

PROUDLY PRESENTS

GRAND MUSIC CONCERT

BY

DR. M.L. VASANTHAKUMARI

ACCOMPANYED BY

KUMARI KANYAKUMARI - VIOLIN

SRI. RAMNAD RAGHAVAN - MRIDANGAM

DATE: SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 14, 1986
TIME: 3:30 P.M.
PLACE: CONGREGATION BETH-EL,
715 PAXON HOLLOW ROAD, BROOMALL, PA.19008
(215)-356-6700

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ADMISSION: MEMBERS: FAMILY $12, SINGLE $6, STUDENTS $4
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CALL:

INDRA RAJAN (215) 698-2064
K.RAMAKRISHNAN (302) 475-8961
USHA STARAM (215)-352-9032
M.M.Subramaniam (215)-356-5181
T.S. VENKATARAMAN (215)-326-6396

GREETINGS:

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate the India Music and Dance Society on 20 fantastic years of providing entertainment, culture, and education to the commonwealth.

Pennsylvania's rich cultural fabric has been woven from an array of artistic and cultural influences from around the world. This vibrant diversity is maintained and glorified through our freedom of expression and the sense of pride we all hold for our individual heritage.

I commend the India Music and Dance Society on your commitment to the preservation, promotion, and instruction of classical Indian-influenced dance form. It is essential that we continue the time-honored traditions, cultures, and heritage we bring through our ancestry in an effort to pass along the promise of endless possibilities to our children. Your work is a prime example of those efforts being realized.

On behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I applaud the India Music and Dance Society on your 20th anniversary and wish you many more years of artistic beauty.

EDWARD G. RENDELL
Governor
September 2006
4.5.3 Creativity Par Excellence (2003)
An Exercise in Manodharma

The art of framing a new Raga and a new Tala for a new song composed extempore on the spot in a Mela Raga, suggested on the spot on December 6, 1982 at the Bangalore Gayana Samaja, was successfully demonstrated to the delight of musicians and rasi kars by the eminent, multifaceted Dr. Balamurali Krishna. The dramatic incident narrated by B. V. K. Sastry is briefly resurrected here as it is a profound, perfect as well as a comprehensive application of exercise and a lesson in Manodharma.

Dr. Balamurali Krishna: “Please give me the Arohana and the Avarohana of any Mela and specify the Mela name”. None offered to reply till Veena Doreswamy Iyengar rose up and said, SRGPMDS SNDPMGRS, a janya of Harikambhoji. The doctor commenced humming to himself and was catching up in his mind with the new Raga and giving it a shape, to which he would be the creator (Brahma). The august audience in the packed hall lay in hushed silence waiting with anxiety amidst tension.

Then he presented the delineation of the new raga, which he named “Dore”, in honor of Doreswamy Iyengar who suggested the initial Mela combination out of which a new raga was to be spun out. Then he created a new Tala and named it “Timukhi” (modeled after Adi Tala with nineteen matras, wherein each beat of hand was of three matra duration.) With Dore as Mata (mother) and Timukhi as Pitha (father) he brought out the child, the new Sahitya in Telegu. ‘Manaku vachuinade Swathantryamu’, highlighting the wide gap between preaching and practice in India. Later a Kannada version was immediately created with the help of a scholar for the same lyric. And he declared before the amazed, overawed audience sitting like statues: “Gentlemen you have all witnessed the creations! I have not brought any book nor have I consulted any as you saw.” It was no magic nor was it a myth. No jugglery either. It was presented to the Samaja in an open demonstration before the cream of musicians and music lovers, a gift of Manodharmic exercise creating a new raga, new Tala and a fresh composition all extempore, It was a magnificent, matchless exhibition of absolute mastery in Lakshana and Laksya born of assurance, competence, mastery and self knowledge.

From ‘Manodharma’, an article by Garland N. Rajagopalan in Shanmukha, A cultural Journal of Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sargazhta Sabha. Vol XXVII, April 2001 #2. (With Permission from the current President of The Sabha.)
4.5.2 Practice! Practice! Practice! (1997)
Chitraveena Ravikiran

Is there a substitute for practice? Not one that I can think of, not even talent or genius, knowledge or scholarship, luck or God’s grace included. There are umpteen talented and even brilliant people who are leading unfulfilled or under-fulfilled lives on their failure to translate their talent into tangible results. There are many knowledgeable scholars who are hardly able to express themselves communicatively. And the lucky ones are forever unhappy with their guilt about having something that they probably don’t deserve and also live with the insecurity as to how long their luck would hold. In other words, one who has not practiced is not in control. With perseverance and practice, one can overcome the lack of talent or genius or knowledge or scholarship or luck, and can indeed do much better than others. There are many types of practices, from an end result point of view. The objective for practice can be polish and perfection, confidence, pleasure etc. From the focus of the aspiring student, practice could be extensive or intensive. He or she may practice something hard to gain perfection in execution. But perfection itself being a journey unto infinity, the artiste will at least be able to familiarize with his or her strengths (which will be projected) and weaknesses (which will undoubtedly be at least camouflaged, if not fully eliminated). And the repeated practice of a phrase or song increases the polish, sparkle and sheen in execution. Here are some good practices to keep in mind. Always concentrate on basics like sruti purity, purity of tone and timber, maintenance of tala and tempo, proper pronunciation and enunciation and word splitting. Also try to learn the meanings of the songs. One can widen one’s perspective by listening to a lot of great masters of the past and present, but seek consistent guidance from anyone reputed teacher. Even after all this, after the student has become an acknowledged master, there could be times when a person’s confidence level goes down. Again, practice bails him or her out. Those who practice for the sheer pleasure of it all are in a different category altogether.

Chitraveena Ravikiran is a renowned Chitraveena maestro

Chitraveena Ravikiran in a SRUTI concert (2005)

FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
December 1 2006

Dear Friends:

Warmest Wishes for the Holiday Season from all of us on the Board to you and your families.

As we continue to celebrate our 20th anniversary year, we are profoundly grateful to all those who have joined us in a very fulfilling journey to promoting and presenting Indian Classical Music and Dance in the Delaware Valley. Hundreds of volunteers, committees, artists, dozens of sponsoring foundations, agencies, corporations, donors, thousands of patrons have all been part of this exceptional journey. Thanks to such a large support base, SRUTI is a strong and vibrant organization and has great capacities to bring the highest quality of Indian Classical Music and Dance to the Delaware Valley.

This year witnessed unprecedented amount of programming and presentation of big name artists at prestigious venues. A 20th year for a classy organization like SRUTI calls for nothing less than big names, big venues and big and new efforts. The Board is proud to have presented 14 events starting with the traditional Thyagaraja Aradhana, followed by a Vocal Recital by Sowmya, Vocal Recital by Ranjani and Gayatri, Mandolin Recital by Srinivas and Rajesh, Vocal Recital by Vijayalakshmi Subramanian, Vocal Recital by M. Balamuralikrishna, Vocal Recital by Kosuru Seshulatha, Vocal Recital by Kiranavali, Vocal Recital by Sudha Raghunathan, Dance Recital by Ramya Ramnarayan, Dance Recital by Priyadarshini Govind, Vocal Recital by Maharatna Ramchandran, Hindustani Fusion recital by Anoushka Shankar, and concluding the year with SRUTI Day featuring local talent. All the above artists were supported by some of the best accompanists. The Kimmel Center and Annenberg Center, two state of the art facilities for the arts in our area were venues for the Anoushka Shankar and Priyadarshini Govind Program respectively. In terms of new initiatives, the Board planned and presented an intensive and accelerated training workshop in Pancharatna Kritis conducted by Kiranavali Vidyasanker and Thyagaraja Utsava Kritis conducted by Prabha Subramaniam. These workshops were attended by about 25 participants from our area. Another new concept introduced was the presentation of two chamber concerts.

Twenty years ago, SRUTI was formed to fill the void of a community arts organization devoted exclusively to Indian Music and Dance. Twenty years later local grant organizations and foundations and the public at large clearly see SRUTI as the leading and serious presenter of such arts in our area. That is indeed a very significant accomplishment and future boards will have the responsibility to maintain and build on this eminent leadership position.

A large number of young adults and kids are attending music and dance classes offered by several teachers...
in our area and in many cases via remote from India and far away towns in this country, using latest technologies offered by the internet and telephony. We find ourselves reflecting on how important it is for SRUTI to nurture this talent and hopefully from this group expect a crop of second generation leaders and volunteers to continue with the preservation and expansion of the SRUTI mission.

We enjoyed serving on the board this year and participating in the various opportunities for fund raising, programming, big event logistics, and management. We again thank all our supporters and members and wish every one Safe and Happy Holidays.

Sincerely
Sruti Ranjani, 2006

FROM THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The current edition of Sruti Ranjani, the annual publication of SRUTI- the India Music and Dance Society marks the 20th year of the organization. This edition is dedicated to previous publications. We have chosen to make this edition primarily a compilation of articles contributed by the community of art enthusiasts and published over the years. We would like to thank M. M. Subramanian, Prabhakar Chitrapu and Sudhakar Rao for taking time to carefully select articles from the past twenty years of SRUTI publications. The articles reflect the excitement of the inception and growth of the organization.

In addition, they provide insight into the environment that helped nourish the organization, the dedicated efforts of the founders, office bearers and supporters. Five year, ten year, twenty year writings mark certain milestones. Reflections on their association with SRUTI have been provided by some of the past presidents. Office bearers have had the opportunity to develop personal relationships with some of the visiting artists.

Photographs of SRUTI events over the last few years are included. They are a visual chronicle of the concert events and the peripheral activities. These photographs speak to the energy that is generated by attending performances of great caliber.

SRUTI has created a niche for itself as a presenting organization in the local community- bringing inspiring performances to local venues in the Greater Delaware Valley. It is the written word which helps to weave together the talents and artistic aspirations of a community. We hope to see more and more of writing from art enthusiasts from all walks of life. Please keep the excitement aglow.

Sincerely,
Raman Visweswaran, Sundari Balakrishnan, Ramaa Nathan, Runga Prabhah Prabhaswarthy
Library Committee, 2006

FROM THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

4.5. General

4.5.1 Thaamadham enayya? (1991)

Composer: J. Shivakumar
Ragam: Mohana Kalyani
Talam: Khanda Chapu

Pallavi:
thaamadham enayya?
KaaraNam koorayya!
(Why is this delay? Tell me the reason!)

Anupallavi:
vethanai theerayya!
sabbanai thevayya?
bodhanai yaarayya?
ke
Loadhenai kotharandhal (thaamadham)
(End my suffering! Is testing necessary? Who is (mis)instructing you? To ignore that and save me why is this delay?)

Charanam:
soorinin orukkazhiya
theeral (mana) kovai
theeral dalaikkazhiythal
neru? kadaikkah
paaro dhunthathal - mayi
lara dhirutthal - sivaku
manai I nei nirutha indhari (thamadham)
(You mighty one, that put down Soora’s pride and arrogance!
Is it fair to dodge without removing my sorrow?
Punishing me by not ‘looking’ at me; not getting
on to your peacock (so that you can get here)
to stop such things, you son of Shiva I, why is this delay?)

Notes:
A heavy dose of double negatives to get some rhyme.
Alignment to show rhyme.
Upper case to indicate retroflex
Not a consistent transliteration scheme. Most Indians use ‘h’ to indicate aspirated consonants. I think in Tamil at least it is more important to distinguish between ‘tip’ and ‘think’ or ‘patru (silk)’ and ‘patthu’ (ten).
2. Reflections on SRUTI—Letters from Past Presidents

2.1 Mani Subramaniam (1986-1987)

I am extremely happy to note that SRUTI is observing its twentieth year of existence. Apart from being one of the founders I have also served SRUTI in various capacities over the years including being its President. Thus I am very much an insider and have difficulty in giving an objective evaluation of the organization's progress. All the same it is very gratifying to note how far we have come since that first concert by MLV on 14 Sept. 1986.

SRUTI is now a leading cultural organization in the Delaware Valley well known for its professional presentation of the leading classical musicians/dancers from India and this country. These artists are happy to have given generous grants for its programs attesting to its stature in the wider world of arts organizations.

A vast number of dedicated volunteers and visionary leaders have contributed to the success of the organization. With all the progress, I am afraid one aspect has not improved enough. I am referring to the lack of large audiences to the programs, except in the cases of "name brand artists". The Indian immigrant population has grown considerably in our area in the last twenty years. However, the attendances at the programs has not shown a proportionate increase. I feel confident that the current and future Boards of Directors would more aggressively market our programs to attract larger audiences.

I wish SRUTI many, many years of continued service to the community.

2.2 P. Swaminathan (1990-1991)

"SRUTI: Matha and Laya Pitha" as goes the popular saying among performing artists. The first half of the phrase is particularly true for me even though I am not a performing musician. I have been closely associated with SRUTI since its inception, starting from the signature campaign to gain the support of the local community to form the organization in 1986. I am extremely grateful to SRUTI for many positive things that happened in my personal life during the past two decades (baring some extraordinary times).

I served in the executive committee of SRUTI in different capacities since 1987 when there was no well defined infrastructure for executing many organizational activities. As a team committed several blunders because of our lack of knowledge and organizational experience. These mistakes were never blown out of proportion. On the contrary, it was a learning experience for me (I am sure of my fellow team members) both intellectually as well as personally dealing with projects and responsibilities which I was not used to in my daily walk of life. I always felt that such training, experience and knowledge can be directly transferred to one's personal as well as career ambitions. SRUTI provides the opportunity for people to realize their untapped skills in music and community leadership. I have encouraged many youngsters to take part into the activities of SRUTI mainly for this reason.

While we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of SRUTI, I have witnessed that it has grown into a fully matured organization thanks to the co-operation, hard work and support of the various committee members and their families. Of course, SRUTI has its share of pain and sufferings in the past years. SRUTI went through some extraordinary times and overwhelming situations thanks to the thoughtless, immune and hasty actions of some SRUTI well wishers. SRUTI has sustained the difficult times because of its robust health and support from the community. Using lessons learned from the mistakes of the past, future leaders of SRUTI should strive hard to take the organization to greater heights. One of the ways, I can think...
went for contrived effects; to him music was for Rakti and Bhakti (1). Semmangudi is well recognized for setting to music many lyrics of Swati Tirunal, Jayadeva, Sadasiva Brahmendra and Subramanya Brahmantha. The name of Ambujam Krishna, as a composer, became popular due to his efforts. Who could forget Bhavayami, from the lyrics of Swati Tirunal’s that is a marvel of brilliant set of ragas with chittaswaras to delight every listener?

In his personal life he was known for simplicity marked by a sense of piety. (3). Highly patriotic, he gave for the national cause generously during India’s independence struggle and switched to wearing Khadi. Later in his life he established a senior secondary school in his village. (2)

A brief life story of Semmangudi appears in Rasiyan’s Tribute to Semmangudi in this issue, in reference 3, the OMANA issue and in the other issues mentioned here and hence will not be given in great detail. His early music training was under his maternal uncle and then his cousin, both violinists. Many distinguished teachers like Gottuvadyam Sakharama Rao followed. In his teenage years, he went to study with Umayalpuram Swaminatha Iyer which makes him a part of the Umayalpuram ‘Sishya parampara’ of Sri Thyagaraja. At this stage, his very first guru Semmangudi Narayanasaam Iyer offered to continue to teach him. Incidentally his name identification, Semmangudi comes from this first guru and Srinivasa Iyer’s gurukula vasam with his uncle in Tiruvindaimarudur which was a rich cultural center with many music recitals on numerous festive occasions. The multitude of Nagaswara vidvans who played their special brand of music, (their paddathi or unique style) throughout many nights produced pronounced impressions on him. (3) His versatility was thus no chance happening.

Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer’s first independent performance was in 1926. (1&3). A brilliant stage career started right away. He was made the Asthana vidwan of Travancore court in 1939 and on the recommendation of Sri Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavar he was offered the position of editing the Kritis of Swati Tirunal. Although Swati Tirunal is a Mukya Vaggeyakars, Semmangudi set to music some of Swati’s “Thiruvimachar” compositions and published them in the weekly, Swadesamitran in Tamil Nadu. He stayed with the Academy from 1941 till his retirement in 1963.

Semmangudi received numerous awards and honors in his musical career culminating in Padma Bhushan in 1990. That he was held in such high esteem even by fellow musicians is illustrated by the fact that Mohanapuram Santanam composed a song to honor him in Karaharapriya. Although Swati Tirunal is a Mukya Vaggeyakars, Semmangudi set to music some of Swati’s compositions and published them in the weekly, Swadesamitran in Tamil Nadu. He stayed with the Academy from 1941 till his retirement in 1963.

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A guru always lives on through his disciples and this is particularly true with Srikantan. He has trained many talented students who have gone on to become distinguished musicians themselves. He strongly believed in the gurukula style of one-to-one training and demanded the best from his students. His disciples include among others, M.S. Govinda Rao, Gowri Kuppuswamy, K.S. Sathyavathy, M.S. Sheela, Seethalakshmi Madhavan, S.K. Vasumathi, M.S. Shashank (flute) and Vidyabhusana Teertha Swami. Many other leading musicians of Karnataka claim him as their guru through the Ramavahini program and the kirti workshops conducted by him. Srikantan’s son Ramakanth was trained by his father and also by his uncle Venkata Rama Sastry. Ramakanth still accompanies his father in concerts, but is also blossoming into an independent concert musician. His daughter Rathnamala Prakash is one of the leading Sopam Sangeet singers of India.

At the age of 75, Srikantan continues to work tirelessly for the cause of music. Having retired after 32 years of service as the music producer of AIR, Bangalore, he has been giving lecture-demonstrations in all leading sabhas of the country. His voice continues to be very powerful and steady and his adherence to sruti unwavering. According to M.S. Sheela, Srikantan still devotes certain amount of his time for his music practice everyday without fail. Another disciple T.S. Sathyavathy, pays him a great tribute when she describes his virtues as a teacher, quoting Kalidasa. “One person may be at his best when exhibiting his art in person, another may have as his special qualification the power of communicating his skill. He who possesses both these skills should be placed at the head of teachers.” Srikantan epitomizes the covenable virtues of a conscious performer and a conscientious teacher.

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A member of the Sruti library committee, Viji Swaminathan is a physicist and a computer scientist.

4.4.6 Some thoughts on Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (2003)

T. Sarada and T. Parasaran

It is difficult to say what a Carnatic music lover would miss with the demise of Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. One of them would definitely be the Bhava, although there are many characteristics of his music that are uniquely appealing. Justifiably called “the old Jambavan and the universal Guruji of Carnatic Music, Semmangudi traveled a long and luminous road to a singular eminence...” (I). His was a true link to the stalwarts of the early 20th century and he continued to set the standard for the next generation of great musicians. Many acclaimed vocal and instrumental artists were directly or indirectly coached, guided or taught by him. Looking through the brief careers of many of these artists in references 1, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer’s name appears more than any other person’s as the one who inspired and assisted their development. Some well known and famous musicians are his disciples as mentioned by N. Rajagopal, in reference 2, like Sri T. N. Krishnan, M. Theagarajan, P. S. Narayanawamy, Yesudas and M. S. Subbalakshmi.

Epithets like the grand old musician, the doyen of Carnatic music and even the term patriarchal pithamohana have been used to refer to Semmangudi. Paramacharya of Kanchi, Sri Sankaracharya called him, ‘Sangeetha Thatha’. What makes him unique is a combination of his contributions to music, musicologists and music lovers, alike. The following statements are all direct quotes and not our making up. Even very early in his life, he learned to develop a unique style of singing by packaging his musical knowledge, skills and imagination in such a manner as to create a great impression. (3). He held the attention and the reverence of listeners and musicians alike for more than seventy years. His theoretical knowledge and teaching ability were only part of his greatness. Musicologists often consulted him on matters of Raga-lakshana. He had an extensive kriti repertoire in many ragas and this made every phrase of his singing beautiful showing the union of tradition and his individual genius. His Alapanas were pure and comprehensive. His Swara singing had both elegance and exuberance and they combined effortless ‘saravalaghu’ patterns. Though a traditionalist to the core, he introduced many novelties on the concert platform. He also revitalized many songs by suitable changes in the tempo. His Pallavis always highlighted Ragabhava and spontaneity. He never comforted Sahitya and never

56

2.5 Reflections on SRUTI for the past 20 years—Prabhakar Chitrapu (2004-2005)

When I think of the time of my presidency of SRUTI (2004-5), I think of the wonderful team – the Board of Directors – that I was part of. I think of the friendships that I had an opportunity to develop; I think of the hectic activity that built up every single time the concert day approached; I think of the many long hours I used to be on the phone almost every single evening; I think of the close interactions with the artists... but none can equal the warm feeling after a successful concert or when one of you would come by to give me & the Board a pat on the back and a word of appreciation. I am thankful to each one of you who had confidence in me and my Board and placed the organization in our hands to lead. There were some rough waters to ride, but I believe we sailed the ship safely to the shores of 2005.

One event I remember in particular was Dr. Yesudass’s concert. It was one of the few sold-out concerts for SRUTI and the artists were scheduled to arrive late in the morning for an early afternoon Sunday concert. Cancelled flights, missed luggage, fire alarm in the auditorium all made for tense times, but they were quickly forgotten as the concert began and the audience thoroughly enjoyed the event.

On a personal side, my family and I have been associated with SRUTI since its inception, with my wife Uma having been on the very first formal ‘Board’. Since then, Uma and I have been serving the organization in various roles and enjoyed them all. SRUTI became an extended family for us and we developed many friendships. Through SRUTI and SRUTI friends, I learned not only about classical music but also about human relationships and colorful personalities. I am indebted to SRUTI for enriching our lives and feel gratified that I gave back some of my energies in return to SRUTI and its cause. May SRUTI flourish and grow for many more years and touch many more lives, as it did mine.
3. Concert Reviews— Fall 2006

3.1 An evening of enjoyable music: Sudha Raghunathan

Sudha Raghunathan is and has been for many years a leading and popular star in the Carnatic music firmament. A torch bearer of the GNB/MLV school of fast, brigha based music, Sudha has developed a style of her own. The concert for SRUTI on September 23, 2006 at the Colonial Middle school auditorium in Plymouth Meeting was the second of a rare double bill - Bharatanatyam performance by Ramya Ramnarayanan preceded Sudha’s concert - as part of SRUTI’s twentieth anniversary celebration. Sudha was graceful in acknowledging this milestone in more than one way during the concert.

Sudha was accompanied by B.S. Raghavendra Rao on the violin, Neyvee Skanda Subramaniam on the mridangam and N. Raman on the morsing. There is a tendency these days among some musicians of packing their concerts with kriti after kriti with very few alapanas and almost all the kritis in Adi talam. [Sowmya’s recent concert for SRUTI comes to mind especially about the talam.] Sudha’s concert was a welcome change. [see the concert listing at the end of the review.]

An expansive Kalyani Followed by the Syama Sastry kriti ‘ Binara varalichi’ was the central piece. Sudha rendered the kriti in tiara nadai Adi talam of (8x3) 24 aksharams for a cycle. It is difficult to maintain this talam with a suitable kala pranama. Thus some musicians simplify it to a Rupaka talam requiring two cycles for the pallavi (6x2x2). I was glad that Sudha did not fall for this simplification. Sudha also exhibited her virtuosity by rendering an alapana for Narayani (Aaama nevee gan) and some interesting svaras combinations. [Narayani differs from the popular Sudha soveri only in the nishadam in the avanatham.]

The RTP in Raitwari was a display of her originality. Sudha chose an unusual pallavi in Tiara jathi Ata talam of 10 matras. The words for the pallavi were “Sri Krishna ghanam, venu ghanam, madhura ghanam (and 11 matras after the arudi) Sruti layamudam serum (Sri Krishna ghanam)”. Sudha cleverly started rendering the lyrics at Sruti layamudam as if highlighting that she was giving a concert under the auspices of SRUTI. There was more to the pallavi. She first rendered it in second kala including tri kalam and tisram; reduced the first kala for the swara pratrasrana and then changed to khandu chupu (5x2) for ragamalika svaras! Compositions of Oothukadu Venkata Kavi (OVK) are often referred to as Sri Krishna Ghanam. To emphasize this point (since her pallavi stared with Sri Krishna ghanam) she chose Natarkurinji, Kanada, Todi, Simhendramadhyamam for ragamalika svaras inserting words from pallavis of OVK’s compositions (Paal vadhyam, mukhathu - Natarkurinji, Aaloy payadeu - Kanada, Thaye Yasoda - Toddi, and Asandadam maji - Simhendramadhyamam) - a very interesting touch indeed.

A note about the tanam. The miridangam and morsing artists accompanied the tanam. This is a tradition followed in Trivandrum during the Navaratri concert series. Since Sudha’s concert was during Navaratri, perhaps they felt it appropriate to accompany the rhythm.

Sudha has a very good stage presence and is a good communicator. It was very nice of her to acknowledge that she was part of SRUTI’s twentieth year anniversary, even mentioning that the very first concert for SRUTI was given by her guru the late M.I. Vasanthakumari. Sudha complimented all the volunteers and leaders without whose hard work the milestone could not have been achieved and exhorted the audience to give a big hand to the present Board of Directors. A very gracious gesture indeed.

Raghavendra Rao, though young, is a veteran violinist. We have had the pleasure of hearing him many times.
A devadasi turned into a devotee. Nagarathnamma’s story has all the archetypal elements of a bhakta’s journey through life: abandonment by the father, a childhood of hardship sustained only by the mother’s will and determination, relentless pursuit of art, accumulation of wealth and fame, the trauma of a murder attempt, disillusionment, the vision of a saint, renunciation, and dedication to a life of service. I believe it offers rich material for a fine dance drama. Here is wishing that some imaginative artist will soon make use of it.

(Jackson’s book was published in India by Motilal Banarasidass of Delhi in 1994. His other book was published by Oxford University Press in 1991.)

Dr. H.Y. Rajagopal is an engineer by profession and also teaches at Villanova University. A very enthusiastic supporter of SRUTI he has previously served as a member of SRUTI’s executive committee.

4.4.5 R.K. Srikantan (1996)

Viji Swaminathan

R.K. Srikantan has been a household name in Karnataka for over five decades. To me the name brings back memories of the days I was growing up in Mysore. I remember, at about the age of four (my earliest recollection), one of my sisters holding me by the hand and rushing to a concert of R.K. Srikantan to get ‘good seats’ (we sat so close to the 2-ft raised platform seating the artists that I could have just reached out and touched one of the artists). Though I did not understand much of Carnatic Music at the time, I enjoyed listening and accompanied my parents and sisters to every concert. The Dasara, Ramanavami and Vinayaka Chaturthi concerts I attended, particularly at the Bidararam Krishnappa Mandira and Anilikutte Rama Mandira are still vivid in my memory. Of all the beautiful voices I came to love, R.K. Srikantan’s was the most familiar one. Not a day went by without hearing his voice either in a concert, a devaranama in the morning, or the Ga-navihara, the music class he held over the All India Radio (my sister, who learnt music from a disciple of RKS, sang along with the students, trying to write down the swaras at the same time).

The coveted honor of the Sangita Kalanidhi award to R.K. Srikantan by the Music Academy has come late, but has been widely welcomed in the Carnatic Music world. I cannot think of another musician who has so pervaded the classical music scene in Karnataka or worked so tirelessly for the cause of music like RK. Srikantan. He is the fifth musician from Karnataka to receive the honor [earlier recipients are Mysore Vasudeva-charya (1935), Mysore T. Chowdiah (1957), Rallapalli Ananthakrishna Sarma (1974), and Mysore Doreswamy Iyengar (1984)]. In relating the facts about his life and career, I have taken excerpts from the many articles that appeared in the Sruthi magazine from India.

R.K. Srikantan (Rudrapatnam Krishnasastry Srikantan) was born in 1920 into a Sanketi family from Rudrapatnam village in Hassan district in Karnataka. Srikantan’s father Krishna Sastry was a distinguished musician, a playwright, a scholar in Sanskrit and Kannada and also a Harikatha exponent. His mother Sannaka was a well trained vocalist. His paternal grandfather, Veena Narayanappa was also a well known musician and a very close friend of Veena Seshanna, while his maternal grandfather Bettadapura Narayanaswamy, was a vina and a vocalist. With such a pedigree, it is no wonder that Srikantan and his brothers revealed an aptitude for music at a very young age. Srikantan’s elder brother R.K. Venkatarama Sastry, was a disciple of Mysore T. Chowdiah and a distinguished musician. R.K. Narayanswamy, another elder brother, was a good vocalist trained by Musiri Subramania Iyer. A third brother R.K. Ramanathan, was a vocalist as well as a professor of English.

Srikantan learnt Carnatic music for about eight years from his father, and later from his elder brother R.K. Venkatarama Sastry who was greatly responsible for moulding Srikantan’s music. When Venkatarama Sastry relocated to Madras to facilitate his career as a violinist, Srikantan’s training continued through his own avid desire to reach perfection. Over the years, his music was greatly influenced by many leading musicians from...
3.2 Maharajapuram Sri. Ramachandran's Concert

Yeshwant Prabhu

Maharajapuram Sri. Ramachandran's concert at the Montgomeryville Community College on October 14, 2006, was a most satisfying, wonderful and traditional kuchipudi. It was one of the finest I had attended in the last five years. It reminded me of the grand concerts of the golden era of Carnatic music, a time when the legendary Madurai Mani Iyer, Aryankudi Ramaniyengar, Chemmani Vaidyanatha Iyer and, of course, G. N. Balasubramaniam were alive. Even though I am writing this review a month later, his superb Hanumadabodi alapana is still ringing in my ears.

He started the concert with a varna in raga Charukeshi, Innum Manam, a composition of Laligudi Sri. Jayaraman. It was followed by the krithi Vinayakapriya Vinayakapriya in the Ghatanga raga: Natta, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri. Talam. pranatharahti in raga Atana, a Thyagaraja krithi was sung with great bhaava. It reminded me of the soulful rendition of Ela nee yadayasu, in the same raga, by the late Sri. Santanam. A superb rendition of an elaborate alapana in Hanumadabodi followed. It was methodically developed. I have rarely heard a Hanumadabodi more beautiful than this. This alapana alone was worth my driving more than one hundred miles to the concert! He sang Thyagaraja's krithi Udethi Ramudu gadu, a composition rarely heard at concerts. Sri. Nagai Murudhanath's alapana on the violin was equally superb.

I was delighted that Sri. Dikshitar's Swaminathena samarakshitham in the raga Brindavani (also known as Brindavanasarasangam) was sung at madhyama kola, to bring out the raga awaara. Many vocalists simply rush through this song. Next he sang an astonishing Poorvi.GetKeyalapana, followed by Dikshitar's Ekam Bairanatham. The violinist's alapana was equally pleasing to the ears. (I am tempted to say that on the violin his melodious Poorvikalapana became Kamaranjani?) A krithi in Huseni, Thyagaraja's Nagai Raghavendra was next. For ragam taanam and pallavi he chose Begada. This is a delicate raga; only a few vocalists sing it well. Sri. Ramachandran's deep voice suited the raga perfectly. The alapana was very satisfying. I was surprised, however, that for pallavi he chose the simple Chaapu tillana, instead of one of the more complex talas such as Attu, Jhampa, Dhruva talu, or even the Deshadi, to give the mendriyad the wider scope to display his enviable talent. I have heard from some mendriyadists that for bhakti aarathanam, the short Chaapu talu doesn't offer much scope for elaborate, unlike the longer talas such as Dhruva talu.

At the request of a rasika, I believe, he sang Purandara Dass's Ksheerabhaavadi Kamike in ragamalika. This krithi was made very popular by his father, and I think Sri. Ramachandran sings it at almost all concerts. He sang with bhava Bhuvaneshwariya Nene maanasave in Mohana. A ragamalika in the ragas Kedaragowla, Dhanyasi and Sucharitra followed by a Tamil Krithi, Koteeswara Iyyer's Velum Mayilume in Sucharitra was excellent. Thyagaraja's Hrudasudu vedale in Yamuna Kalyani was very pleasant. I believe the artist gave special attention to the sukha aspect of Carnatic music. He concluded the concert with a superb talaan in the raga Basant Bahar, a composition of Sri. Santanam, followed by Thyagaraja's Pavaman in raga Saudastram. Lasting more than four hours, the concert was well balanced, and interspersed with quite a few elaborate alapanas. All in all, it was an extraordinary, most memorable concert. I left the hall with my heart bursting with joy, and my head ringing with divine music.

I must say that at most vocal concerts, the accompanying artistes rarely match the vocalist. Even though I would be breaching etiquette, I must say that I truly felt that the violinist even excelled the vocalist at many places! Mannuradurai Sri. Sivamani's rendition was of very high caliber also. As a result, the entire concert was elevated to a level one rarely experiences these days.

Yeshwant Prabhu is a Chemist and an aspiring vocalist. He learnt Carnatic vocal music from Flutist Sri. Gopalakrishna Iyer and Composer/Vocalist Sri. T.N.Bala.

It on the anniversary date, while the larger group held it at the Sankarolik College for four days starting on that date. Nagarathnamma and her group of women conducted their worship in front of the samadhi. In 1938 she decided to sell away all her jewels to raise funds for making the much needed additions, an assembly hall and a kitchen; and in 1940, largely due to her efforts, the three groups decided to form a single organization, the "Srithi Thirugana Mahotsava Sabha." 

Nagarathnamma lived in Tiruvariyur in her final days, devoting herself completely to the service of her Guru Sri. Tyagagur, who was also her ishtadevata, and to the teaching of his music. In 1952, her health deteriorating, she heard about the passing of one of Tyagagur's descendants (brother's lineage). Grieving over his loss, she felt acute pain in the chest. A doctor was summoned who prescribed some injection which she refused.

She said Rama's name alone was sufficient for her. She told one of the devotees present, "Touch my forehead; the name of Rama is contained within me." Though in pain, she remained cogent, thinking of her own ishtadevata and his ishtadevata. She lay her head in a disciple's lap and died peacefully, with the names of Rama and Anjaneya on her lips. The day was May 19, 1952.

As instructed by her will, her friends arranged for her samadhi on the banks of Kaveri. But the residents of Tiruvariyur, who so dearly loved and revered her, buried her mortal remains in front of Tyagagur's samadhi, so she would always remain at her master's feet.

Nagarathnamma was a colorful personality, enormously capable and courageous, compassionate and witty. She had an amazing talent for putting people together and getting things done. And what is even more remarkable in a person of such religious fervor is that she had a great capacity to make people laugh. She won many honors and titles, but the one that gave her much satisfaction was "Tyagarajasevasakta." In 1951, around the Aradhana time, Rajaji said of her: "All the musicians and vidwas should offer homage to this sannyasini of our times." Nagarathnamma, however, was never one to rest complacently on honors and tributes. She spoke out against the way the Aradhana was conducted: "Though the celebrations were spectacular, the element of bhakti was lacking in the atmosphere. There was more pomp and show than a simple offering and dedication." Nagarathnamma never forgot the trauma of her childhood, the slights and humiliation and hardships she and her mother had to suffer. Their valiant efforts to lift themselves out of a place society did not look upon as a man. Nagarathnamma burst out laughing and chastised the great poet: "Shame on you! Despite all your learning, you do not know that Muttu Palani had the honor of being a devadasi, like me." She tirelessly championed the cause of women artists. Her will charges the executors "never to deport from the real spirit of principle and purpose underlying the celebration," and forbids anyone from trying "to debar lady artists and singers including devadasis." She wanted more women to spread the music of Tyagagur.

Tyagagur always denounced those who used music for material gain. How then did he call upon her, one who had become rich through her art, to build a temple for him? There is a universal belief that the pure at heart are always dear to God regardless of their outward status in life. There are innumerable stories in religious literatures of all lands attesting to it. As for the guru, Indian tradition believes, as Swami Rama says in his book "Living with the Himalayan Masters," "When the disciple is prepared, the master appears when the wick and oil are properly prepared, the master lights the lamp." When Purandaradasa was in search of a guru, after renouncing all his wealth following his encounter with the poor brahmin asking for donation to perform his son's upanayanam, a vision appeared in his dream telling him to go to Vyasasram. Non-believers in such mystical experiences and proponents of the western psycho-analytical approach may contend that Nagarathnamma's vision was a self-induced one, for after all, by her own admission, Tyagagur appeared in the same form she had conceived him in her daily worship. Perhaps, in the final analysis, all this really doesn't matter so east or so west, if you go far enough, you reach the same point.
the great violin vidwan Munsawomappa, who was a disciple of Wolugapet Venkataramana Bhagavator or his son Krishnaswami Bhagavator, both of whom were direct disciples of Tyagaraja. Thus started a spiritual link with Tyagaraja, which only became stronger with time, and ultimately transformed her life completely.

During the next four years, under the able guidance of her guru, and the watchful eye of her mother, Nagarathnamma made tremendous strides in music and dance. Puttalakshamma was pleased. But, unfortunately, just when her daughter was about to launch on her illustrious career, she died. Nagarathnamma was only fourteen at that time.

Sometime thereafter, a performance she gave at the home of Veena Seshanna, the legendary musician of the Mysore court, attracted the attention of the art connoisseurs and patrons. She was invited to perform at the Palace, where she was later appointed as the Durbar musician and dancer. Her fame began to spread.

When she was 25, her guru Munsawomappa died, and then began another chapter in her life. She moved to Madras where one Rajarathna Mudaliar became her patron. She bought a house in a neighborhood where many other musicians lived, including Veena Dhanammal, who became a close friend to her.

Nagarathnamma either did not have any children of her own or lost an only child, a daughter, at a very young age. Yearning for a child, she adopted a young girl from a poor family. By this time, Nagarathnamma had amassed so many riches that the parents of the adopted girl, coveting her wealth, plotted to murder her. They were so blinded with greed, they did not hesitate to employ their own little girl to be part of their scheme. At the girl approached Nagarathnamma with a cup of milk laced with poison, Nagarathnamma sensed some danger. Maybe the girl’s faltering steps gave her away but Nagarathnamma later said that she felt someone was tugging at her hand, cautioning her not to drink that milk. She forgave the child, but the shattering experience brought on a deep sense of disillusionment concerning her wealth, her desire for a child, and her very existence. The child died shortly thereafter.

One night in October 1921, Nagarathnamma had a vision of Tyagaraja in her dream. As she recorded in her last will and testament:

"It was a rare blessing for me to have the vision of Sri Tyagaraja Swami in the form in which I have conceived him in my daily worship. It was for me a call to pay my homage to the great soul at his samadhi and I obeyed it".

Nagarathnamma was mystified, wondering what to do as she had no knowledge of Tiruvaiyur. However, the next day, as if to help her in motion the great task that was to consume her for the rest of her life, Bidasaram Krishnappa, the great vocalist of Mysore came to visit her. Nagarathnamma told him of her dream. Bidasaram Krishnappa listened to her carefully, and explained to her the meaning of her dream, that she had been called upon to dedicate her wealth to the service of Tyagaraja. He took her to Tiruvaiyur the very next day and what she saw there deeply pained her. The place was in utter disrepair and was subject to all kinds of abuse. As she recalled later, “there was then only the Brindavan with the stone slab on side feebly announcing to the world that the remains of the great soul lay interred within.”

The very pain she felt turned into an inspiration. She lost no time in following up on the call. Endowed with great strength of will and single-mindedness in the pursuit of a goal, which she must have inherited from her mother, Nagarathnamma succeeded in laying the foundation for Tyagaraja’s temple the very same month. It took another four years of work before the temple was completed and dedicated.

Nagarathnamma felt, however, her work was not done. Although the temple had been completed, there were no facilities for assembly or food preparation. In those days there were three groups that performed the Aradhana separately. The smaller group would hold it on the bathing ghats of Kaveri for five days concluding with the exhilarating Bharathanatyam performance of Priyadarshini Govind opened at the Annenberg Center, on October 7, 2006 with a Devi stuthi, Jaya Jaya, that immediately set the tone and tempo for the rest of the performance. The feminine power in all its glory was woven on stage where you witnessed the divine compassion of Devi. Her portrayal of Devi’s Saurandhara spoke volumes about her abhinaya skills. The Ragamalika varnam that followed next was a show of perfection in all aspects of Bharathanatyam, the geometric aradhana, the subtle but distinctive attami, the ease and flow of adavus, the clarity of expressions, the adherence to tradition, the defined arudis and body extensions. The varnam was indeed poetry in visual form.

If we thought that we had seen the best of Priyadarshini in the varnam, we were at once proven wrong in her rendering of Siruvan in Bhavapriya. A verse from Purananondu, she has been working on for the past six months, set a sharp contrast in mood to the vibrant varnam. This was about a mother searching for her young son in the battle field, in an attempt to verify the rumors she had heard that he was killed by an arrow to his back as he was running away from the battle field as a coward, contrary to the way he was raised to be a brave soldier. As Shakhthivel, the mridangam artist of the evening, raised the battle field drum beats, the mother enters the scene filled with shame searching for her son. When she finally finds him dead from an arrow to his chest disproving all the rumors she had heard, the mother is so overcome with emotions, a somber, dense pathos takes over. I would be surprised if there was one person who did not shed a tear for the mother, the dead son, and her sad, but fulfilled ambition in a brazen lad. We might say the Saraswati varnam she portrayed was indeed too young for war does not matter, but what actually matters is the intensity with which Priyadarshini unleashed the emotions on stage. The sadness and depth with which she hit you with her total surrender to the character - of the mother - she was playing, was unmistakably striking. You become a pawn in her hands dancing to the emotions that she invokes in you.

A javali Samayambide followed. She pretended to be the faithful wife and bids farewell to her trusting husband with tear filled eyes. She then transforms to a coy, flirty woman the minute she shuts the door. Cheating on her unsuspecting mate, she challenges her secret lover to be bold in demonstrating his love for her. The javali was done extremely well were you were able to see the sudden contrast between the shy faithful wife and a flirtly light hearted nagaya.

The rhythm Kavadiychindu brought a sway and swing among the audience responding to her movements and the music.

Kadakandoodalam thillana of Balamuralikrishna was performed as only Priyadarshini could perform. It almost seemed like it was composed with her in mind though she came to fame many years later. The sarpanch was the first time I have seen it employed in a thillana very effectively.

She concluded the performance with a mangalam on Muruga of Sri Lanka. Vocal by Preethi Mahes was exceptional for a performance that was complete and satisfying leaving a longing to see and hear more.

Following are couple of quotes from the audience who were foreign to this art form:

“I am going to India soon. This program was wonderful” Thomas Scasins - he added the he would like see more.

“Brilliant, I could have sat here for hours today. I would come back again” Francis McAliskey.

Priyadarshini’s form and beauty seems just made for Bharathanatyam and her well developed techniques, grace, alacrity and precision made the program one of a kind leaving you thirsting for more.
4. Selected SRUTI Articles From The Past 20 Years

4.1 SRUTI

4.1.1. ‘SRUTI’ - Five Years And Growing (1991)
T.S. Venkataraman

In recent years, it is a common experience for the lovers of Indian Classical Music and Dance in the Greater Delaware Valley to attend performances by five to six top ranking artistes every year. In fact one of the problems of “SRUTI” is to try to accommodate all the visiting artistes due to conflicting schedules.

This was not the case, however, before 1986 - the year ‘SRUTI’ came into existence; not because there were fewer artistes visiting this country, but because there was not much of an effort to bring many artistes to perform in our area. Prior to 1986, if we had any treat of Indian Classical Music and Dance, it was mainly due to heroic efforts of a few music loving individuals like Mr. T.N.Bhal from this area. Because of the tremendous effort needed to successfully organize even one program, these programs were necessarily few and arranged very infrequently. Also, the audience for these programs was small consisting mainly of those who knew the organizer(s) and others who got to know of these programs by word of mouth. It was not easy for an individual, however dedicated, to generate a large mailing list and maintain it, especially without the advantages of the modern computer systems. Thus many artistes were simply bypassing the Philadelphia area.

It was these considerations that gave fillip to a group of music lovers to start a formal organization. Actually the seeds for such an organization were sown at an informal discussion during the lunch break of Thyagaraja Aradhana, organized by a few individuals in March 1986. Soon after, the group met and decided to form an organization to be called ‘SRUTI’, The India Music and Dance Society, dedicated to fostering Indian Classical Music and Dance forms in the Greater Delaware Valley.

While the group went through the initial organizing efforts, they were also looking for an opportunity to start off with a ‘bang’. Such an opportunity came their way in September ’86 when Sangitha, Kalanidhi Dr. M.L. Vasanthakumari was visiting the US and the group found it very appropriate to have the inaugural concert by her. The large attendance of 200+ people at the concert confirmed to the organizers that they had set the ball rolling by starting a much needed organization in this area. True to its name, ‘SRUTI’ engaged in its second program- Classical Bharatanatyam performance by Jothi Raghavan with live accompaniments of Kalamnaim Kuttan and group.

Like any flailing organization, ‘SRUTI’ went through some ‘teething’ troubles. After the initial euphoria had died down, the attendance for the programs dwindled. Part of the reason was that some programs were organized on Sundays. Saturday has always been the ‘prime’ day for such cultural activities and the sponsors who arranged concert tours of artistes required higher fees for Saturdays. Working on a shoestring budget, ‘SRUTI’ could afford only Sunday programs which did not generate enough revenue, leading to a vicious circle. However, the group persevered waiting for popular crowd-drawing artistes.

The breakthrough came when ‘SRUTI’ arranged the performances of Dr. Padma Subramanyam, Padmashri Dr. N. Ramani and Padma Vibhushan Dr. N. Balasubraman. The sell out attendance at some of these concerts gave ‘SRUTI’ recognition not only in the immediate Philadelphia area, but also in North Jersey, New York and Maryland areas. These programs helped ‘SRUTI’ build a decent amplification and recording sound system and a sound financial base.

Right from its inception, ‘SRUTI’ had decided that it should be community oriented organization providing

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Dr. Sitaranayya, is a Biochemist. A Founder member of SRUTI, he is also an editor of the newsletter/publication for the Telugu Association. The above article is an adaptation of his article which originally appeared in that publication.

4.4.4. She Followed A Dream—The Life of Bangalore Nagarathnamma (1996)
H. Y. Rajagopal

Recently, on a visit to Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg, Pa., I stopped at the bookstore, and found a new book on Tyagaraja by a western scholar. I hadn’t known of any book on him by a western writer until then, and the title was rather intriguing: Tyagaraja and the Renewal of Tradition, with a byline that said: “Translations and Reflections.” The author was William J. Jackson, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University, who, I learned from the dust jacket, had written a book on him earlier (“Tyagaraja, Life and Lyrics”). The book contained a translation of the opera, Nauka Charitram. I browsed through a few pages and liked, at least tentatively, what I read. I have since been reading it more carefully, and the initial promise seems to hold. The book contains many interesting topics which need to be read, discussed and debated. I would like to share my thoughts on the book on a later occasion, but for now I would like to concentrate on one of its chapters, the one on the fascinating life story of Bangalore Nagarathnamma, a great devotee of Tyagaraja, who was largely responsible for the organization and conduct of Tyagaraja Aradhana at Tiruvaiyaru in its present form. It is but fitting that when we venerate the Guru, we also pay homage to an ardent devotee of his.

Jackson’s account of Nagarathnamma’s life is based largely on two biographies of her, one by Banni Bai, and the other by T. Sankaran, and to some extent on Nagarathnamma’s last will and testament. Jackson uses the name in its Tamilized form as Nagarathnammal, probably because both his source biographies were in Tamil but I shall use the name in its original Kannada form as Nagarathnamma. That is the way she is referred to by her illustrious contemporaries vayyekayaka Vasudevashavya (in his brilliant memoir of the musicians of his day ‘Na Kanda Kalavidaru’) and D. V. Gundappa, the great Kannada writer and authority on culture, in a short pen portrait of her.

Nagarathnamma was born on November 3, 1878 (probably in Mysore). Her mother, Purtolikshamma, belonged to the traditional Devadasi class of artists. Her father, Subba Rao, a lawyer by profession, deserted the family when Nagarathnamma was barely one and a half years old. The distraught mother did everything in her power to prevail on him, but the guru would not relent. Once again, the resolute mother, instead of meekly surrendering to the circumstances, left Mysore in search of a guru for her talented daughter, vowing never to return home except triumphantly with her daughter established as an accomplished artist.

Her search first took her to Madras, then to Kanchi and Srinangam, and finally to Bangalore, where she met

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Quality programs at affordable prices. Occasionally, due to higher artiste fees and auditorium expenses, some programs had to be priced higher than what ‘SRUTI’ would normally like to. ‘SRUTI’ set up certain standards like starting the programs on time, making the copies of such concerts available on quality tapes etc. As of now, ‘SRUTI’ has arranged a large number of other vocal and instrumental programs by the Bangalore Sisters, Lalgudi Srinivasa, Mandolin Srinivasa, T.R. Subramaniam, Maharajapuram Santhanam, Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy and dance recitals by Dhananjayans and Sanjukta Panigrahi- to mention a few.

‘SRUTI’ also encourages North Indian Classical Music and dance by arranging the Jugal Bhandi programs by Bhimsen Jashi, Balamurali Krishna and the great Hflitar Chaurasia, Odyssey dances by Sanjukta Panigrahi and other forms of dance programs like Kathak etc. Based on the audience response to these classical programs, I am sure many more of these will be arranged in future.

In addition, consistent with SRUTI’s objectives, it welcomes and encourages participation by the experienced as well as the upcoming local talents by arranging suitable programs. This is evident from the tremendous response during the day-long annual Thyagaraja Harathi festival paying tributes to the great composer Saint Thyagaraja. Also, many concerts and dance programs by the U.S. based artistes like Simanthini Kortha, Sitalakshmi Madhavan, Vijaya Prabhakar, Shaktunala Srinivasa, Ramya Harishankar and Jothi Raghovan were arranged in the past.

Seen from the performances arranged by ‘SRUTI’ over the years and the response from the community in the area, we have a large number of talented young and experienced musicians and music and dance lovers in this area. ‘SRUTI’ should do everything possible to sustain this and encourage as many artistes as possible. We know that it requires a lot of time and dedicated service by many members of the community to keep this going. While we thank all the members of ‘SRUTI’ for their continued support and encouragement and the members of the managing committee for their devotion and dedication, we look forward to many more people to get actively involved in these efforts and help build even a stronger organization.

4.1.2 History and Growth of SRUTI (1996)

M.M. Subramaniam and H.Y. Rajagopal

On 14 September 1996, SRUTI celebrates its tenth anniversary. From small beginnings, today SRUTI has grown to be the premier institution presenting classical Indian music and dance in the Greater Delaware Valley. It is fitting that the day’s events include a dance program, a music concert and recognition of a member of our community for his contributions to music. From its inception, it has been among SRUTI’s goals to have a mixture of dance and music programs and to regularly recognize talented artistes in our midst.

It all started in March ’86 at the Thyagaraja Aradhana organized by S.Rao Yaddavalli and M.M. Subramaniam (Mani) at the community hall in Broomall, P.A. At lunch time, the general conversation turned towards the lack of regular classical music or dance programs in the Greater Philadelphia area. Indeed, during the previous years, as part of the Festival of India programs or otherwise many well known artists had visited U.S. and given performances. Among them were Lalgudi Jayaraman, Maharajapuram Santhanam, Roda Subramaniam and T.N. Seethapoglan. None of them had performed in the Philadelphia area. The big question was why?

We had to point out that it was not as if there were never any concerts in this area. Some dedicated individuals, notably T.N. Balu, had expended Herculean efforts to bring reputed musicians to this area. Inevitably they were few and far between. Dance programs were fewer still.
To explore the question more fully and find solutions, Mani offered to call "a meeting of minds" gathering of people who had organized programs or were interested in such activities.

About 20 persons met on a warm July afternoon at Mani’s place in Broomall. The consensus among the gathering was that only a structured organization with its own bylaws and elected Board will be able to arrange programs in a consistent, professional manner.

The group elected an interim committee with Mani as convener and consisting of T.S. Venkataraman (Secretary), K. Ramakrishnan (Treasurer), Usha Ari and Indira Rajan as members at large. Simultaneously a by-laws committee was constituted with H. V. Rajagopal as chair. C.P. Ramaswami and A.K. Srinivasan were the other members of this committee.

At the recommendation of the interim committee, the name SRUTI, The India Music and Dance Society was adopted for the proposed organization.

As the group went about the organizational efforts, they were looking for a big name artist to help them get going. The late Sangeetha Kalanidhi M.L. Vasanthakumari was scheduled to tour U.S.A. and SRUTI jumped at the opportunity to present one of the foremost musicians of the day as its inaugural program. It took place on 14 September 86, ten years ago to this day. It was an unequalled success. The audience of over 200 attested to the fact that SRUTI was fulfilling a felt need.

True to its name, the second program was a Bharatanatyam program by Jothi Raghavan of Boston. Her program also underlined another part of SRUTI’s mission, namely to present talented artists resident in N. America.

SRUTI decided in its first year itself to celebrate Thyagaraja Aradhana as its first event of a calendar year. At this day long program, anyone who can sing or play an instrument is given an opportunity to perform one of that great composer’s songs. In addition, each year SRUTI also recognizes a highly talented artist in this vicinity and invites that person to perform with suitable accompaniments. This extends upto N. America. SRUTI decided in its first year itself to celebrate Thyagaraja Aradhana as its first event of a calendar year. At this day long program, anyone who can sing or play an instrument is given an opportunity to perform one of that great composer’s songs. In addition, each year SRUTI also recognizes a highly talented artist in this vicinity and invites that person to perform with suitable accompaniments. This extends upto N. America. SRUTI gratefully acknowledges the volunteer contribution of the services of Mr. Kumud Gandhi.

As with any fledgling organization SRUTI went through "teething" troubles, including skepticism among some and even open antagonism. It was hardly possible to break even on the concert. Only the seed money provided by Life Membership helped the organization to keep afloat.

Meanwhile, the by-laws were adopted in December ’87. The by-laws contain the following mission statement: (1) promote and foster the classical music and dances of India, and (2) bring together, in a spirit of cooperation and unity those people of the Delaware Valley that are interested in these arts and effectively serve their common interests.

The first full fledged Managing Committee (MC) was also elected at the same meeting. Following this article is a list of all Managing Committees Through the years.

SRUTI was registered as a non-profit organization in the state of Pennsylvania in May ’88. The IRS recognition came later in December ’92, thanks to the efforts of the Resource Committee and the Managing Committee. SRUTI gratefully acknowledges the volunteer contributions of the services of Mr. Kumud Gandhi.

4.4.3 Kshetrayya (1992) Ari Sitaromaya

Today, when a Kuchipudi or Bharathanatyam dancer performs a Padam, there is a good chance that it is to a composition of Kshetrayya. Kshetrayya’s Padams are in simple language, laden with romantic expressions and provide excellent opportunities for the dancer to exhibit her talent in Abhinaya. Kshetrayya is one of a very few composers who contributed greatly both to music and dance. In addition, his life’s story is remarkable for other reasons also. He chose early in life what he wanted to do and stuck to his decision in spite of the mandouss adversities. Also, Kshetrayya is one in the line of Desi Telugu poets (people who wrote in non-sanskritized Telugu or old Telugu) who wrote for ordinary people. Even when ridiculed and challenged by the scholars of the day, he remained committed to his style of writing in simple and elegant Telugu and impressed even his detractors with his poetic prowess. Finally, the appreciation his poems enjoyed from kings, courts, sans and common people in his life time, the rejection they suffered from purists in late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the popularity they enjoy today in concert halls reveal the fluidity of our culture and morality.

Let me share with you what I learnt about Kshetrayya in my readings. Kshetrayya’s original name was Varadayya. He was born around 1595 AD in Muvva, near Masulipatnam. In Muvva as well as in the nearby Kuchipudi, temples served as centers of education in music, dance and languages. Like the other Brahmin boys of the day, Varadayya received instruction in Sanskrit, dance, Vedas etc. Some dance teachers of that time barred women from learning and performing dance, but others continued to teach the dance to Brahmin boys as well as to girls from the Devadasi and Rajanarthaki communities. While in his teens, Varadayya was deeply in love with a Devadasi girl called Mohanangi, probably a classmate. However, he married his maternal uncle’s daughter, Rukmini, around 1615 AD. The infatuation with Mohanangi was evident in the Padam he wrote “Inni vidhamula pujinchera saami! Inthi nanu gurchumi” in which he asks the Lord to intercede for the rejected girl. Varadayya probably attended every performance Mohanangi gave at the local temple as a Devadasi. On one occasion, Varadayya made advances to her in the temple. In a moment that changed his life completely, Mohanangi spurned his advances and suggested that he prove himself worthy of her family by writing songs in praise of the Lord or some such scholarly activity rather than waste his time trying to entice her. Varadayya was heartbroken. His love for Mohanangi was sincere and deep. His strong desire for physical union with Mohanangi was evident in the Padam he wrote “Dinhi vilthamulam pujinchera saami! Anthi nanu gurumchi” in which he asks the Lord to fast and make him worthy of the love of the woman he has spurned. The Lord, who is Muvva Gopala, the deity in the temple of Muvva, responded quickly. He encouraged Varadayya to visit the Telugu Nayaka kings (Raghunatha Nayaka, Chapa Thalap, Lord, I will worship you in many ways; please unite me with this woman). Some scholars think that divine intervention was responsible for turning Varadayya into a lyricist. It is most likely that his love for Mohanangi was such that he was not able to accept the rejection by her and chose to devote his life to writing and singing about his love. But if he chose to make Varadayya the hero of his lyrics his Padams would not have been accepted by the people at large. Instead, he made Muvva Gopala, the deity in the temple of Muvva, the hero of his songs.

Varadayya’s lyrics caught the attention of Devadasi. His singing and their dancing to his songs was not appreciated by the elders of the village. There was also a story that he was romantically involved with a widow. In response to a social boycott by his community, Varadayya chose to leave Muvva around 1625 AD. He went on a pilgrimage to various temples in the south. The tearful farewell was found in the Padam “emani thelupadi nelaguthalludu nemichethune cheliya? Bharamo yuriki bayaduderrivela premamane naasori pilicheppe maata?” in Anandabai, Tirupata talam (What can I tell you about the conversation we had when he called me just before leaving the village? How can I tolerate this? What shall I do?) The journey took him to Bellamkonda, Bhadrachalam, Yadugiri, Srisailam, Hampi, Vyjyangarangam, Hemadri, Pandi (Anantapur Dt), Palaka (Cuddapah Dt), Tirupathi, Thiruvandur, Kanchipuram, to Kanchi around 1625 AD. The most admired admirer of Varadayya at that time was Thupakula Venkata Raya (Thirumala Nayaka, Beggars go the philanthro...
Sruti Ranjani, 2006

His music is a synthesis of South Indian culture and is as great as any form of Indian culture. Its Telugu is as simple almost as the Telugu of the girl that goes home in the evening, singing, with her bundle of fresh cut grass. But from such slim footing Tyagaraja’s music rises tall as the world. Its tradition is Tamil, the tradition of Alwars and Nayanmars. Its grammar is Comatic, that is to say, South Indian. Its culture is Indian in its vision. Its spirit is human, the spirit of man, the top of creation, communing with his creator. Everyone in South India can understand it, can feel its rhythm, can follow its spirit and feel at home in it. Tyagaraja, more perhaps than any other single musician, has preserved for us our one great live art with an appeal both deep and wide.

The language of religious music sometimes manifests an undefinable power to reach deeply into individuals and bring out the best human qualities, fostering understanding and feelings of kindredness in people otherwise estranged. While German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz thought of music as “unconscious counting,” this accounting leaves out “song’s” potency to educe refinement. A European composer and theorist of music wrote in 1739: “It is the true purpose of music to be above all else a moral lesson.” Perhaps we should think of Tyagaraja as an illustration of this; he was a persuasive master expressing through mandalas of exquisite sound and conciseness a sense of unity and justice, making life more bearable and meaningful regardless of the brutal realities of the times. Tyagaraja could wield the old ragas and discover new ragas able to displace fearful events in the memory of his listeners. His music is an intangible but nevertheless real and important power—something sheltering and shared, an artful exercise of specialized smarts and conscience anchoring standards of creativity and religion in a time when intense changes inundated his region in wave after wave.

Temple complexes in South India have walls, which at times might be used as protective fortifications from hostile forces. The Maratha kings not only kept armies to repel danger, but also to defend community, and remain on top. To be fair we must add that these rulers also tried to patronize Hindu saints and singer-scholars, and to promote culture in many forms. Maratha rulers recognized that defense and force alone could not provide viable relationships to a society, or bring about cooperative goodwill, altruism and creative spirituality. King Sardarajji knew memorable beauty could bring a king auspicious fame. But he found that Tyagaraja’s vision was not an item available for exchange. Tyagaraja, for his part, should be judged as a singer. A singer should not be expected to recruit armies, or confront social problems in the way people of other regions at later times think proper. A singer should sing.

Figuratively speaking, in the “spiritual temple” of the whole Hindu community the central sanctum sanctorum or garbhagriha (“womb-house”) is tended by inspired saintly geniuses, too popular and mainstream to be called mere esoteric mystics. Living turned toward the holy, these saints comprise the creative inner heart of Hinduism, the part which helps vivify the whole; they are the conscience keeping the powerful concerned with justice, and giving the lowly the strength for joy.

Dr. William Jackson is a Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of several scholarly books on Tyagaraja, including “Tyagaraja: Life and Lyrics.”

SRUTI is a well structured organization. An elected MC carries out all the tasks involved in planning of events including the choice of artists, scheduling etc. A Library Committee maintains the master tapes and makes copies of the concerts which are available to the members of the community. The Library committee is also responsible for SRUTI RANJANI, the quarterly publication of SRUTI. More recently, a Technical Committee was formed to assist the Library Committee in recording and creating master tapes of concerts. The MC also appoints other committees when needed to carry out specific tasks. One such committee, the Board of Directors, has coordinated all the activities connected with the celebration of the tenth anniversary.

While all the committees mentioned above are ad hoc committees appointed by the MC, the Resources committee (RC) is a statutory committee consisting of a President, 3 other appointed members. It functions in an advisory capacity to the MC. It develops long range plans and makes recommendations regarding fund raising and other activities needed to improve the financial and other resources of SRUTI.

The efforts of the RC of past years have resulted in SRUTI gaining recognition by IRS as a non-profit organization. This in turn has helped SRUTI being recognized by and receiving grants from The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, The Philadelphia Foundation, and The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News.

1988 was a watershed year for SRUTI. The flute concert of N. Ramani was sold out. Maharajapuram Santhanal’s concert attracted a large audience. And more than 700 people attended Padma Subrahmanyam’s Bharata Natyam program.

This last program was a huge financial success. However, the MC had underestimated the enormous popularity of this great dancer: They originally had booked a hall with air-conditioning and a capacity of nearly 300. But within a few days of the announcement of the program, requests for tickets far exceeded that number. In a hurry they booked another auditorium with a much larger capacity but unfortunately without air-conditioning. With the day of the program being one of the hottest days of the century, the audience were not able to fully enjoy the program of a great artist.

This was a very hard lesson to learn, but learn they did. Under the leadership of Mani Subramaniam, P. Swaminathan, Anand Kuchibhotla, Renuka Adinarju and Dinokar Subramaniam, SRUTI has since presented many sold out programs during the last ten years to the full satisfaction of the artists and the audience.

The list of artists who have performed under SRUTI’s reads almost like a Who’s Who of Indian classical music and dance artists. They include:


The artists residing in N. America who have performed for SRUTI include T.N. Balasubramaniam, Anand Kuchibhotla, Renuka Adinarju and Dinokar Subramaniam. SRUTI has since presented many sold out programs during the last ten years to the full satisfaction of the artists and the audience.

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SRUTI whenever possible coordinates its activities with other cultural groups in the area. It has worked with the Tamil, Telugu associations and Triveni, the Kannada Association of the Tri-State area. Some of SRUTI’s programs have been cosponsored by the arts department and/or student associations of Drexel University and Villanova University.

If today SRUTI has attained its high stature among lovers of Indian classical music and dance from India, it is due to the dedication, tremendous hard work of its leadership and the many individuals and families who have willingly volunteered their time and services. They all deserve our sincere appreciation.

As we look forward to the second decade, we hope that SRUTI will not only continue to enhance the cultural environment of Philadelphia area but also grow in many directions. The membership should reflect interest of every branch of Indian classical music and dance. We also hope to see a larger number of Hindustani music aficionados among the audience in Carnatic music programs.

We join the well wishers of SRUTI in wishing it many decades of service to classical music and dance forms of the Indian subcontinent.

M.M. Subramaniam and H.Y. Rajagopal are two of the founder members of SRUTI.

4.1.3: 10th Anniversary dedication to Sruti (1996)
Composed by T.N. Balu

RAgam: mOhanam   TAlam: Adhi

M.M. Subramaniam and H.Y. Rajagopal are two of the founder members of SRUTI.

model of society is also found in Roman thought, and in medieval conceptualizations, such as those found in John of Salisbury’s Polycratus. Society is like a body; “Let the eye be an eye, the hand be a hand.” Though this view often put the peasants at a disadvantage, it was a means which evolved to conceptualize the whole.

In India the social order is traced to the Vedic origin myth of the Cosmic Person; in Europe the body analogy was the rhetorical device or reasoning means most commonly used to persuasively convey a rational understanding of society as organism like – a living hierarchy of interrelated parts, each with his place in the whole scheme, each a link in the great chain of being. Especially from the 12th to the 16th century in many European works society is analogized in body imagery: “Invoked in every economic crisis to rebuke extortion and dissension with a high doctrine of social solidarity,” the analogy of the human body provided a rationale. “Bitter realities of the social order were thus made palatable into the whole edifice of feudal society – class privilege, class oppression, exploitation, serfdom. But these things cannot, it is thought, be treated as simply alien to religion, for religion is all-comprehensive. They must be given some ethical meaning, must be shown to be the expression of some larger plan...[Hence] a functional theory of society [emerged; namely,] Society, like the human body, is an organism composed of different members. Each member has its function: prayer, defense, merchandise, or tilling the soil. Each must receive the means suited to its station, and must claim no more. Within classes there must be equality...”

The idea that society is like the human body writ large is thus a pervasive archetypal idea, a primary vision of humanity’s wholeness. Inherited injustices, whether within India’s caste system, European feudalism with its kings and bishops, free-trade capitalism with its robber barons and captains of industry or Marxist socialism with bureaucrats and workers, all are subject to correction by the human conscience seeking justice. The world in which Tyagaraja strove saw new merchant classes rising, both in Europe and in India; it saw war with Muslims and the ascendancy of British power, as well as decline of the rajas. Hence, it saw the gradual disintegration of the Hindu social order ordained by brahmanic ideology.

From the distance of two centuries we imaginatively stand, as it were, at the gopuram or gateway to that historical situation and suggest what seems to have been involved in Tyagaraja’s response. Tyagaraja refused to acknowledge the British in songs, but he was resolutely preservative of important indigenous musical elements which had been accumulating in Tanjavur and elsewhere in South India for centuries. His way was an insistence that foreign rule did not mean loyalty (bhakti) to Lord Rama’s rule was now a thing of the past. His songs reaffirm the way of other earlier saint singers whom he echoes. They criticize hypocrisy, and promote spiritual values which bhakti inspires.

Tyagaraja is often pictured in paintings in the Haridasai attire of the singer-beggar, which he is supposed to have commonly worn. He practiced unscholliavritti, strolling, singing and receiving alms. Tyagaraja’s appearance in these pictures memorializing him offers a clue. Victor Turner has suggested that a simple mode of dress "signalizes that one wishes to approximate the basically or merely human, as against the structurally specific by way of status or class." Tyagaraja voluntarily chose the dress of the haridas, literally the "slave of God," rather than that of the king’s companion -- developing the “powers of the weak.” Tyagaraja the renunciate-householder, the other-worldly music yogi, shared a sense of outsiderhood with the poor, and he offered communitas in his works, first in the music itself, which is a world-dissolving flow of bhakti, and secondly in namadivevanta’s free access to the divine and to liberation through prayer and repetition of the holy name. This sadhana or discipline was open to all, “regardless of caste, sex or status.” Another brahman, whose songs are sung by all classes in India, Rabindranath Tagore, wrote of “The farmer, the weaver, the fisherman, [who] all sustain the world with labor,” saying that he desired to enter their “intimate premises.” “I know that the song basket is empty! If filled with trinkets when links/are gone between life and life./And I know my failure, whenever/ my song has been incomplete./Whenever it has missed the all.” Tyagaraja’s songs succeed in catching “the all” with their life-linking power, even if he did not personally train lower caste disciples. As one South Indian earlier in this century put it, Tyagaraja was singular in the wide-
with a sense of the holy. They meant to him survival of the heritage he valued most in a chaotic world.

Various ideas of justice stand behind the organizational logic of enduring societies. The rationale for the system which perpetuated the inequality of different castes in India is often found reflected in popular religion. For example, a recent study shows how ancestral spirit veneration served to reproduce at the level of religious imagination the social hierarchy in Bengal. Such practices which ritually enact or narratively elaborate on hereditary status and its continuation in the invisible world of spirits, reveal how unequal hierarchical relations are reproduced generation after generation over long periods of time. In Tanjavur it is noteworthy that in the annual procession, a major part of the Seven Shrines festival, a parayar (low caste man) with a royal parasol leads the procession line, reminding all of the myth depicting the Vedic god Indra becoming a parayar. This practice affirms and helps reproduce the hierarchical system of inequality by giving the representative parayar great honor one day of the year. It is a recognition of the large part played by the low castes of society in the delta economy. The parayar remains a parayar, though his connection with the high god Indra is ritually celebrated. In outward display even the lowly receive their due: “Every dog has his day” or even the poor enjoy days of feasting.

The orthodox explanation of the rank and relations among castes in India is ancient and widespread. In the fountainhead of brahmanic ideology, the Big Veda, the myth of the sacrifice of the Cosmic Being, Purusa, tells how the different segments of society come into being. First, purusa, is said to be all creatures and all existence. The Person has a thousand eyes, a thousand heads, a thousand feet. Encapsuming earth on every side, he rules firmly established in the heart. The person, too, is all this, both what has been and what is to come...

(1) One fourth of him is all-existence; three-fourths in the ethereal undying (2) ... [When the gods sacrificed purusa to generate the universe and all beings] when they divided the Person, how many-fold did they arrange him? The Priest (brahmana) was his mouth; of his arms was made the Ruler (rajan); his thighs were the Merchant-folk (vaishya); from his feet was born the Servant (sudra). The rest of creation -- moon and sun, fire, sky, and so on, also came from appropriate portions of the original cosmic Person. All come from the primordial sacrifice of purusa, and it is said that the generations are all bound by dharma of birth, karma and rebirth. Bad deeds are said to bring low status, and doing one’s own birth-determined work leads to perfection, Krishna declares in the Bhagavad Gita. The lower castes often are not persuaded to this view. And Gandhi and others have worked to rid India of injustices and inhuman attitudes based on birthrights, and to improve matters by land reform, and legislation to insure opportunities. I am not an apologist for caste injustices or tinkathia or indebtedness exploitation schemes in which the poor are bound in fruitless dependency.

It is sometimes said that the old brahman ideology formed the “glue” for the social system. But a living society is more like an organism than like a collage or patched pottery. The ideology in original intention was therefore more like unifying lifeblood and coordinating nervous system, made up of fibres of ritual, symbol and rationale derived from the religious order. In this view, because of the law of karma, each member of society was suited to birth at his or her level of dharma. The priest, the ruler, the merchant and the servant played complementary roles in this ideal scheme, with nature’s law of just deserts ordering the body politic. A large part of the caste system was profession-based, like the guild system in Medieval Europe: families of craft people, members of trades. The different limbs of society were all integral parts of the same Purusa. The Western world held and developed a remarkably similar rationale for aristocratic and feudalistic social organization. In Platonic Republic the mix up of work, one member of society performing another’s function, is injustice, while each person performing in the community the function which best suits his or her nature, is deemed justice.

Later, Gnostic concepts of the human community envision a fall from a higher realm, by which an originally undivided “Human Form Divine” becomes divided into conflicting functions, each an incomplete part of humanity, and each with a dominant tendency or talent -- “intellect,” “desire,” “craftsmanship,” etc. This organic
were enthusiastically imbibed by us. We made it a habit of bringing books on Sri Thyagaraja and his songs and followed stotrots like Raman, Balamarukrishna, Santanam, Nadanuri el al during the early 90s were well attended. However some of the concerts did not probably break even. The prices were quite affordable and all the concerts were held during weekends and yet the attendance was poor; this used to be baffling. In fact we are sure that it has been agonizing for all the organizers whose tireless efforts do not seem to be well rewarded in this respect.

The following programs in the 90s still stand out as super performances. Jugalbandi of Bhimak Jothi and Balamarukrishna, Mandolin performance by U. Srivivas, Vijaya Siva in SRUTI for the first time, Chitti Babu’s only Veena concert in collaboration with the Telugu Association and Ravi Kiran’s Chitra Veena. Similarly some of the out-standing dances in the nineties were Sanghamithra, the dance Drama of Dhananjayans troupe. Samajka Panigrahi’s Odissi, a beautiful dance performance, Krishnan Vande by International Dance Academy and a performance by Chitra Vasudevan. We also had the superbly conceived and executed dance program “Jag Jaya Devi” of Laljudhi Jayaraman. M.S. Sheela, T.V. Sankaranarayanan, Sanjay Subramanian, Bombay Jayeshree and NityaShree are some of the other leading artists who gave concerts here in late 90’s.

I have to say that it has been a rare gift to the local SRUTI members that we could all watch up-close great artists, the footwork and Abhinaya in dances: mention should be made of dance performances of Shobha Sharmo, Adyar Lakshmanan, and Dhananjayans (who will Forget his Nandan?) Alamel Valli, Raja and Radha Reddy, Daksha Yagnom and other such performances. Equally thrilling were the opportunities to listen to great North Indian Sattriya Sanggeet in our own back yard as to speak.

While we could not attend any of the workshops that SRUTI arranged in the area I have heard much praise for these from people who attended these.

It is commendable that with very limited resources and only with volunteers we have such remarkable activities and concerts to please all members. Another example of the volunteer effort is the SRUTI publications. SRUTI Ranjani, the book edited by Vij Swamianthan, SRUTI Ranjani, (the annual issues) the quarterly SRUTI Notes and the special Aradhana issue every year have all been vital parts of communication with the members. Currently we also have a website that any organization can be proud of. They are user friendly, are updated in a timely fashion and are informative. Without volunteers none of these would be possible.

All told SRUTI has come a long way. There is still a wasteland regarding a hall and/or a place to call our own. We do have a good sound system and have professional quality recordings, cassettes and CD’s. I would like to end with this wish list. If we can increase our attendances, if we can get more active participation from younger audience, if we have our own base and build a library then we can rest a bit on our laurels. To follow one of my favorite sayings which is the motto of my alma Mater, Annamalai University in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, let us move to greater heights, “With Courage and Faith”.

T.Parasaran is a retired chemist who is interested in listening to all classical music forms and especially Carnatic music because of his origin from Tiruvururu.

4.4.2 Understanding Thyagaraja’s Niche in Society

Dr. William Jackson

The task of the historian is to explore and understand the totality of evidence in the case at hand, and to discern whole patterns which enable comprehension. This task ideally transcends bias. It is desirable neither to allow fascination and enthusiasm for the high culture of the brahmans to blind one to the rest of the social system, nor to demonstrate one’s empathy with the peasants by developing animosity toward the upper castes. The world historian, as William McNeil wrote, can balance the emphasis on conflicts, by cultivating “a world view which gives equal weight to the Brahmins and to the peasants.” In such an approach, the world just “as a peasant nourishes his patch of land.” The peasant is the little man who gives to the king the fruits of his labors on that land- patch. The king is the “big man” who pays his revenues to the cosmic person or supreme being, by distributing the fruits of his realm’s “patch” to brahmans, who worship and specialize in relating to the absolute, promoting culture and prosperity, and enhancing royal honor. Both king and peasant are beholden to the giver of life, their common divine reference point beyond this world of limits and changes.

The organizing principle here is a kind of fractal-pattern logic with self-similarities at different scales. It reflects a cosmic pattern of religious rationality, existence in a whole context of meaning: a continuum of consciousness which links peasant, King, and God in an ordered lifeway.

For bhaktas of South India it is significant that Tyagaraja’s father had a dream which was thought to be divinely inspired. It directed him to live in Tiruvayaru, and that he communicated this dream to the king governing that area, who is also said to have had a complementary dream. This shows that the family’s establishment of a home in that village was not to be thought of as a result of the king’s will but was part of a divine plan which people wish to recall as ultimate. It shows that the king acted not on his own initiative, but was subservient to the deity. The king wanted to be recognized as a patron of respected artists and holy men, and as a humble devotee himself Tyagaraja turned his back on this patronage which had fed his father and music guru, and he returned to the original deepest source of brahmanic authority renunciation—the ideal of being in the world but not of it, living beyond self-interest and attachments. He signals this by dedicating his works to Rama, and to bhakti saints from earlier times such as Parandoraadu and Bhadrocramam Ramadas, not to kings. He did not want to appear as an indebted dependent or amusement for the king. It seems he felt called by a higher sense of mission than his father and music guru did. He longed for divine patronage, and sang innumerable songs to King Rama, pleading in most of them “Protect me accept me as subject, O Divine Guardian.” Tyagaraja’s lifeway and work-ways were keys preserving links...
4.2 Music
4.2.1 Nada Sudha Tarangini (1992) —Nanduri Krishnamurthy

Music is the cultural heritage of humanity. It is the soul and symbol of universal fraternity. A study of music history enables us to understand the aesthetic sublimity and the ethical fragrance it has radiated through the valuable renderings (songs) of the saint poets, the Trinity of South India in particular. It is believed that the saptahawasas originate from the five faces of Lord Siva which are called Sadyojatha, Aghara, Thirupurusaha, Easana and Vamadiva. (Sadyojathai Pancha Vaktra Su. 52. 6A MA PA DA NE Vara saptahawasa vidya islam). Lord Thyagaraja has given the name saptaha Dwara Vidya to music.

Sadyo Tha (the nectar of Nada) is the very source of Vedas, Puranas, Agamas and all Sastras. Ramagam is Kakhandam, the celebrated bow of Sri Rama; the Sapthaswaras are the seven bells which adorn his bow. The three strings of the bow’s string. Ceaseless motion (gathi) is the arrow. The chosen words spoken by Rama are the beautiful Sangathis. So, if you are keeping score, it is 1 for other composers, Thyagaraja? well not quite zero.

Now to talam. Thyagaraja did introduce many innovations. He composed songs in which the eduppu is not only a quarter or half matra from samam, but even one and one half matras from the samam — e.g. Gana murthi (Gana murthi), Enta narachina (Suddha Dhanyasi). But when one thinks of talam complications interwoven into a composition, Syama Sastri’s name stands out. His intricacies in chapa (both 3+4 and 4+3 varieties) are simply astounding. So, here again Thyagaraja is not the unanimous choice for uno numero.

As for lyrics - honestly who cares? That is the thought that prevails when we hear the words mangled by many contemporary singers. More seriously, I have heard many Telugu scholars downplay the role of Telugu literature - there have been greater poets. For bhakti laden music, the heart rending compositions of Bhadrachala Ramada would surely find a place at the top.

So, the basic question: “why is Thyagaraja really great? remains unanswered. Or is it? Simply stated, while some may have excelled in a single aspect of compositions, Thyagaraja was superb in all of them. It is more than that. It was he who introduced the beautiful concept of aagati: e.g., Dhvinni (Suddha saaveri), Rama nee samama (Karaharpriya). Many of his compositions provide nice spring boards for elaborate neravals; e.g., Kanaka sundara (Chakkam mangam / Karaharpriya), vedas astra (Endhaku pedala / Sankarabharanam) and scores of others. He excavated and brought out the beauty of a number of ragams which were unknown before him; the most outstanding example being Karaharpriya. As already noted, he made many innovations in weaving the talam into his compositions.

Thyagaraja perfected the kriti format consisting of pallavi, anupalli and charanam with the later part of the charanam having the same dhatu as the anupalli. Almost all his compositions exhibit this basic three anga format (He himself strayed away from this mold in his pancharatna kritis (which by the way, are in a class by themselves), bhajana/utsava sampradaya kritis and a few others, notably Brachwara evadi (Sruti ranjan), Sri Raghuvara (Kambhojali)). His contemporary, Syama Sastri, used this structure with some embel-
4.2.2 On the Origins and Early History of the Sitar (2000)
- Allyn Miner

The sitar is the most famous instrument of North Indian classical music, so it is surprising that details about its origin and early history are not readily available even in India, let alone in the West. As a student of the sitar during the 1970s I became fascinated by the stories of the sitar players of past generations and was eager to find out more about the history of this wonderful instrument. I found that there were a number of popularly held beliefs about the age and the source of the sitar, but soon found that many of these ideas were contradicted by other accounts. I was fortunate enough to receive funding for an extended project of research, and the work became my dissertation for a Ph.D. in Musicology from Banaras Hindu University (1982). Today I believe the subject of India’s musical history is important not only for the sake of intellectual curiosity but for helping to illuminate the social and cultural complexity of India’s past. This is especially so in view of periodic social and religious ten-sions centered on issues of cultural history. Below I am pleased to present some of the basic points about the history of the sitar and I hope this material will stimulate music lovers to think about music and society.

It is a widely held belief that the sitar was invented or introduced into India by the 14th-century poet-poet-musician Amir Khusrau. Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), born of a Central Asian father and an Indian mother, was a renowned poet in the service of the Emperor in Delhi. In his prose and poetry he expresses deep admiration for Indian culture and music. We know from his writings that he was competent in Persian music as well, and he decribes a number of Persian instruments in his poems. He is often credited with the invention of the sitar, the tabla, and khyal vocal music, and is thought to have introduced new ragas into Indian music as well. While he may have made some contributions to Indian music, however, no-where in his writings do the terms “sitar” or “tabla” appear. In fact, these instruments do not appear in any writing or pictorial source in India during his time. What’s more, they do not appear until a date more than three hundred years after Amir Khusrau’s death.

Written mention of the sitar first appears in the Muraqq-i Dehli, a Persian-language work describing the city of Delhi in 1738 during the rule of the late Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. The Muraqq-i Dehli tells us that the leading musician of Delhi was the vina (sarangi) player Na’mat Khan. Na’mat Khan is still remembered by performers today as the creator of modern khyal vocal compositions, and is better known by his signature name “Sadarang.” The Muraqq-i Dehli tells us that there was a player of the sitar in Delhi, and that he was Na’mat Khan’s brother. The book does not give his name, but some later oral sources tell us that Na’mat Khan’s brother was named Khurram Khan. It is probable that the sitar had entered India undocumented before the 18th century.

The small three or four-stringed “setar” was a Persian and Central Asian instrument and was probably circulating in northwest India for some time before it reached Delhi. A regional sitar tradition in Kashmir may date to before the 18th-century. Piecing together the evidence, we must tentatively conclude that the sitar first appeared in Delhi in the first half of the 18th century, brought from the northwest. Na’mat Khan’s brother, Khurram Khan, made the instrument known in the Delhi court. It is not difficult to see how this man could have later been mistakenly identified with the 14th-century Amir Khusrau. An added factor would have been a general popular desire to attribute a long history to the sitar in India.

Once introduced in Delhi, which was the urban model for sophisticated life in North India, the sitar quickly spread to other cities. More easily played than the difficult bin (the North Indian or Rudra vina), the sitar was taken up by all categories of musicians. It was first used in accompaniments to singing and “nautch” dance: nautch girls accompany the recitative with slow and graceful movements, beating time with their feet, on which little silver bells are hung to the music of the sarangi and sitar (Smith).

The orchestra is made of the mizhavu (the percussion instrument) during a Chakyar Koothu performance was caught taking a nap and was fired by the angry dancer. Nambiar is said to have then developed Ottanthullal overnight to present to a highly appreciative audience the very next evening. Although the truth behind the reason for the origin of Ottanthullal has been questioned, Nambiar has tried to bring out through this dance form, the social conditions of his time, including class disparities and the whims and weaknesses of the rich and influential members of society.

This dance form has made-up looks that similar to that of Kathakali. A single presentation may last up to two hours in length. The dancer dances and simultaneously sings and this requires intensive training, a flexible body and a strong communicative voice. The dancer also has to rely on a good memory so he can remember and recite long verses. The emotions presented in this dance form are mainly bravery, humor, irony, anger and devotion. The erotic element is altogether absent. The dancer wears a long white and red colored cloth around the waist to form a knee-long skirt. The vest is decorated with colored beads and glass as well as with ornaments. The face is painted green, the lips red and the eyes highlighted with black dye. The headgear is extensive and very decorative. Bells are worn on the legs just above the calf. Unlike Kathakali or Koodiyattam, Ottanthullal does not use curtains for entry and exit or background scenes and props.

No account of the classical dance forms of Kerala can ever be complete without explicitly mentioning the important role that the Kerala Kalamandalam has played in the very existence today of these various art forms. Established by the outstanding poet scholar, Vallathol Narayanan Manon along the banks of the river Bharathapuzha in Cheruthuruthy, a small village in Trissur district in 1930, this institute has played a major role in not only preserving Kerala’s dance art forms, but also in training young talent and recruiting the best in Kerala to carry out the training. It also brought increased patronage and resurrected both Mohiniattam and Kathakali from near-extinction.

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“Dakshyagnam” by Kala Mandalam, Sadhanam, Margi, and Kottakal (2005)
In this role the early sitar shared with the sarangi and the tabla a reputation of social disreputability that attached to courtesan music in the 19th century. Gradually, however, as it was taken up by professionals who rose, the sitar attain the respectability of a solo instrument.

Within less than a hundred years of its first introduction in Delhi, it had become North India's most popular instrument. In 1834 the writer Captain Augustus Willard writes: The Sitar is very much admired, is used by...
Kala Menon

The state of Kerala is the narrow coastal strip situated in the southern most part of India. Bordered by the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, it is well-known for its distinctiveness in language, attire, art forms and its humble yet exotic geography. It is the land where Ayurveda took its roots, where the influence of Sanskrit is obvious and where Adi Shankara, the exponent of Advatva philosophy was born. Kerala is a melting pot where several ethnic and religious groups such as Hindus, Christians, Jews and Muslims co-exist. There are at least about 35 different tribal people in this state. The state is a priceless repository of several different classical and folk dance art forms that not only represent preserved tradition but also the welcoming of outside influences.

Kerala has a long cultural tradition associated with the temple that has witnessed the evolution of the different classical dance art forms. Kaatham-balam or temple-theaters are unique architectural institutions within the precincts of Kerala’s temples that are marvels of structural craftsmanship which surpass their modern counterparts with respect to acoustics and illumination. The Kaatham-balam are elaborately decorated with plan tain trees, bunches of tender coconut and coconut leaves in preparation for a performance. The stage itself however, is generally kept very simple. This is the theatre where kings and ministers, aristocrats, scholars, warriors, poets and intellectuals gathered to witness dance and music performances. Kerala has five main classical dance art forms: Koodiyattam, Krishnattam, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Ottamthullal.

The only surviving link we have with the traditional Sanskrit dance-drama of India is the Koodiyattam of Kerala since before the tenth century A.D. Koodiyattam literally means “dancing together”. It is Kathakali’s 2000 year-old predecessor. Kulashekhara Varma Cheraman Perumal, an ancient King of Kerala, is believed to be the creator of this art form. It is strictly staged in accordance with the tenets of Sage Bharatha’s Natyashastra and deals with the plays of eminent Sanskrit drama tists such as Bhasa, Harsha, Kalidasa and Saktibhadra. Traditionally, the performers have been members of the Chokiar and Nambar castes (temple castes of Kerala). Chokiar enact the male roles and the Nambar (women of Nambar) take female roles. The actors and actresses render verbal acting in stylized Sanskrit and in Prakrit (a colloquial form of Sanskrit). Dramatic gesture language, chanting, exaggerated expressions of the face and eyes, together with elaborate head-dress and make-up are integral parts of this art form. A Vidooshaka (royal clown) humorously tells the audience in the local language, Malayalam, the thematic development of the text. Music is provided by the mizhavu drums, the small cymbals called idakkal, kuzhal - an oboe like wind instrument, and the shankha or conch shell. Performances usually last several days, the first few days being devoted to introductions of the characters and incidents from their lives. The theme for the rest of the days is based on mythology. The koodiyattam, another form of group dance-drama is yet another fore-runner to Kathakali in its origin, and is performed in the well-known Krishna temple in Guruvayoor. It is based on the Sanskrit poem, Krishnagiti. This dance form is believed to have been created by a Zamorin king, Raju Manavedu, in the seventeenth century after a miraculous vision of Krishna at the Guruvayoor temple. The traditional performance lasts for eight days and is presented as a sequence of eight plays that cover the whole span of Krishna’s life from his birth or Avataram to Swargarohanam or ascension to the heavens. Kelikkattu is the first event of the evening carried out around 5 PM by playing the drums (mudhalam), cymbals (lathalam) and the gang (chopadi) at the East Alpad or entrance to the temple to inform the neighborhood about the performance scheduled for the night between 9 and 10 PM. A lamp is then lit in the make-up room at dusk. The actors start their make-up with the actors sitting around the lamp. As soon as the Sanctum Sanctorum is closed at the end of all the daily rituals, the Kali Vilakku (a huge oil lamp) is lit in front of the performance area from the lamp in the make-up room. The musical instruments are now brought to the stage and the musicians take their respective positions. The text of the plays is sung in the aspara style by two main singers. The visual effect is enhanced by varied and colorful facial make-up with larger-than-life masks made of light wood and cloth padding. The

References


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and grace. Smt. Rukmini Devi constructed, so to say, a well defined structure and gave the basic steps a beauti-
ful shape. Each student was made to understand mentally each adavu from the starting position of the feet
and hand gestures, to the finishing position and the stages through which the feet and the hands move during
the process. So much so, each basic unit (adavu) became a well defined, finished product, like a geometrical
construction with a touch of grace. The student was expected to execute this bodily, of course in three
speeds, with grace and elegance. This systematic approach has helped as a guide line for the teachers and
taught and also helped in maintaining discipline and a high standard. Besides, it has also brought about a
uniformity amongst the students. Stress was also made on foot postures like Ayata, Alida, Prenkana, Swash-
Aak. Other aspects on which stress is made are (One is at a loss to find the exact equivalents in English for
these Tamil expressions):
1. Kulukku Nadai (get with a graceful jerk)
2. Azutham (firmness)
3. Valaivu (bend)
4. Saivu (slant)

If assiduously practiced, this rigorous training enables the student to execute these movements in various
combinations with facility and ease. These details, though apparently minor, add a tremendous lot of beauty
and grace to the total presentation; be it an adavu, or on item. In essence, the nritta aspect is treated with
special care with an emphasis on angaasuddham.

(3). Nrtiya:- The abhinaya part comes much later in the training period of a student. The usual theme of
‘Shringara’ is dealt with subtly and suggestively. The Nayaki- Nayak bhava is given a philosophical interpreta-
tion, “The Jeevatma yearning to attain union with the Paramatma.” The pieces chosen for abhinayas are al-
ways deities of well known Keetas and the Nayiko of the Uttama type is the preferred choice. Emphasis on
Bhakti Bhava is made. This is more so while teaching the young teenagers who were able to gain mastery over
Nritta. The students were taught enough to understand the nuances of the Nayiko-Nayaki theme. Themes for abhi-
nya, body movements, and other ideas considered to be refined were carefully avoided. Care was taken
not to expose the children, especially, to any vulgarity of ideas. This attitude was perhaps a great necessity in
days so that the art would gain acceptance amongst the people and an essentially conservative society.

(4). Choreography:- Smt Rukmini Devi’s Choreographic works are matchless. Her dance drama productions
stand testimony to this fact. She was the one who opened the eyes of the students to learn and appreciate
the beauty of the sculptures, painting, etc., and its close link with the art of dance. In spite of this fact, she
had reservations in incorporating those “Sculpturesque poses” in her choreography in the dime-a-dozen style.
The various postures of Lord Nataraja, for instance, were taught to be dealt with care, awe and reverence.
Perhaps, Brahma the sculptor of the human form fared badly as against man, the sculptor on stone. While
the made to measurement madanikas, apsaras, Gods and goddesses that are found in all tile temples of our
country are stunningly beautiful, shear joy and treat for the eyes; the same when translated to We human
form, was not always all that appealing (but for some exceptions!)

Because of the great effort and pioneering work done by Smt. Rukmini Devi, the art of Bharatanatyam has
gained tremendous popularity and wide acceptance in the present day society. Perhaps some rigid views which
were a necessity for the acceptability of art in those days; are irrelevant in the present day atmosphere.
Perhaps an over stress on aspects like angasauddha deterred the growth of abhinaya; perhaps the choosiness
of themes strangled the growth of the repertoire. These aspects could be reconsidered and modified in the
present day context. However, the institution she struggled to build over 50 and odd years, has evolved a
style of its own, a methodology of teaching which is worthy of merit, and should continue from one student
generation to the next. Could this be called the Kalakshetra Ban?

Varanarth Vadlam, a dance teacher from Bangalore, was trained at Kalakshetra and a disciple of Rukmini Devi
Arundel.

4.2.3 The Differences between Western Classical and Carnatic Music (2002)

Janani Prabhakar

What is music? It is defined as a "form of art with vocal, instrumental, or mechanical sounds having rhythm,
melody, or harmony." (Merriam-Webster). This definition can be applied to music around the world. The fac-
tors that make each form of music different are the themes, compositions, modes, and structure used in
each particular art form. These varying factors make the music from the country unique and also help iden-
tify its people’s culture and lifestyle. Being a student of both South Indian and Western classical music,
the difference between these two art forms has been, for me, a very intriguing concept. The variations be-
tween the two forms, conflicting in their themes, composition, modes, and structure, help to bring out their
individual beauty. Western classical music is "equally tempered" with 12 keys per octave; whereas Indian
classical music is "just tempered" with 22 keys per octave. In Western classical music, an equally tempered
key means that an octave is divided into twelve geometrically equal keys, each key separated by a specific
ratio. This is not the case in Indian classical music where a lot of oscillations of the note and nuances are
required while rendering the music. Hence twelve keys per octave are not sufficient. A just tempered scale
is one where the octave is divided into equal keys, but where the specific ratio that separates the keys is
variable. This requires each individual key to be tuned separately. When playing a piano, which uses the
"equally tempered" scale, the notes jump from one to another, while in Indian classical music, the notes flow
through the frequencies and require each individual key to be tuned separately. This is a major difference between Indian and Western Music. Another
distinct difference between the two art forms is that Western classical music can be harmonious while Car-
natic music cannot. Harmony is produced in two ways. One-way is when several instruments play different
melodies simultaneously as in an orchestra. Harmony is also produced when two or more tones (chords) are
played at the same time. By using chords, one can produce harmonious sounds. Chords, orchestra and har-
mony are absent in Indian classical music. Carnatic music is melodious. Melody is a "rhythmic succession of
single tones organized as an aesthetic whole" (Merriam-Webster). Several harmonics notes are never played at
the same time in Carnatic music. Western music is more harmony-based than melody-based; whereas, Carnatic
music is solely melody-based. In Western classical music, the keys are labeled with letters of the alphabet.
In Indian classical music, the keys are labeled with syllables. We call these seven syllables (sa, ri, ga, ma, pa,
do, ni) "Sapta Swaras or Seven Notes. This notation is known as Solfege notation. It is a set of syllables
that help describe musical melody. This same kind of notation is also found in Western Music which is given
as do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti. Instead of singing notes like "C, C sharp, F flat," one can sing, "do, fa, la" instead.
This makes it easier on the performer. The difference here is that the Solfege notation found in Indian classical mu-
ic represents the keys; while in Western classical music they do not. They are merely substitu-
tions for the keys. Music is an art that can take many shapes and forms in various countries. Learning In-
ternational classical music helps me to understand the people and culture of India. Western classical music gives
me a connection to the world in which I am growing up. The differences between Indian and Western classi-
cal music help to bring out their individual aesthetic beauty.

Bibliography:


(February, 23, 2002).

Janani Prabhakar is a junior member of the library, committee. She is eleventh grade honor student attend-
ing Upper Dublin High School. She has been learning carnivac music for several years.
4.2.4 The Musical Works of Thyagaraja (2003)
Prabhakar Chitraprav

How many songs did Thyagaraja write? One comes across various numbers: Some claim that he wrote 22,400 songs, equal in number to the slokas in Valmiki’s Ramayana. Others maintain that the number is around 1000. Still others say that only some 800 songs are available. So, I got rather curious and began to list all the songs systematically. I consulted the following well known books on Thyagaraja:


I came up with a total of 710 songs. I must mention that there are some factors that may render this number inaccurate. The first obvious factor is that my search may not be comprehensive. Second, there are several songs that are believed to have been composed by others - with Thyagaraja mudra! Why did they do this - to immortalize themselves in a wrong way? Who were these people - clearly they must have been very capable musicians who lived after Thyagaraja’s death (1847) and we know most of them by name! The books referenced above claim a total of 23 songs whose authenticity is doubtful. They are: Aishwaryam ledemi (Andali), Dinama Sudanima (Lotangi), Elara Sri Krishna (Kambhoji), Endu Bayara Daysa Inakulathilaka Daya (Dhanyasi), Emurunnara (Malasvari), Ganamurthe (Ganamurthi), Garudagama (Gowri Mancheri), Maavarti (Naksabhusathanam), Naata Jana (Simhandhraamadhyanam), Nila Balama Balama (Amadabhumiranam), Parumukhamelana (Swarati), Parumama Kama (Hamsabhumirani), Parulama Vedana (Bolabhumam), Raghunayaka (Hamsadhwanam), Rama Namama (Atana), Ranganayaka (Sankarabharananam), Sarasa Netra (Sankarabharananam), Sarasiruha Naye (Amrutarvashiri), Tanama Ni Mahima (Kalyanam), Vanaja Nayandar (Kedara Gowlam, Vedala (Todi), Vinatasuhaa (Hanikambhoji) and Nidu Charana (Simhandraamadhyanam).

In any case, the songs available fall into some natural categories. In no specific order, we begin with the set of five matchless, monumenta, demanding Carnatic music compositions, namely the Ghana Raga Pancarchana Kritha. Whether these were treated as such a set at the time of Thyagaraja is a valid question. The answer that I often come across is ‘No. They were first so treated by Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer in early 20th century’.

Two musical operas written by Thyagaraja are available, namely Nauka Charitram and Prathala Bhakti Vijayam. (He is said to have written a third opera ‘Sita Rama Vijayam’ which is not available today). They contain 20 & 42 songs respectively. Nauka Charitram is a light-hearted account of how Krishna goes out on a boat ride with several Gopikas, when the boat gets caught in a storm. I do find this to be a very unique theme among all of Thyagaraja’s works, in that it is rather secular in spirit and not heavy with devotion or vairagya. In fact, we even see traces of romance in some of the songs, which I found nowhere else in his compositions. Nice to know that Thyagaraja was also human!

Then we have the popular, relatively easier set of compositions called Utsavam/Bhajana Sampadaaya Kirtanams. How many songs form this set? My search came up with 29 songs in this category: They are - in sequence: Hechchchariaga Rasa (Yadukulakambhoji), Keluvayyanadade (Devagandhari), Sita Kalyana (Sankarabharananam), Nalapu Sri Rama (Sankarabharananam), Nagumomu Galava (Madhyamavathi), Jaya Mangalam Nitya Subha Mangalam (Ghattha), Jaya Mangalam Nitya Subha Mangalam (Nadanakalra), Patiki Haratri (Swarati), Sabhane (Pantavartali), Aaragimpe (Todi), Pula Panpu (Ahir, Badalika Dira (Ritigowla), Uyyula Lugava (Nilambiri), culture. And I am sure, this culturally rich society will live forever given the unstinted efforts by the younger generation.

Aramma Subramanian is a Bharatanatyam dancer who has recently moved to the Delaware Valley. A disciple of Chitra Vishweshvaran, Rama is clearly multi talented as evidenced from her article above and she is also a teacher of Bharatanatyam.

Chitra Vishweshvaran and troupe

4.3.4 Evolution of The Kalakshetra style (1996) Vasantha Vedam

The history of dance known as ‘Sadir’ in the good old days which was renamed ‘Bharata Natya’ in later years is well known. Smt. Rukmini Devi was one of the pioneers who made the bold venture to learn this art directly from the Nattuvanan clan. The spiritualness of this divine art was a great source of inspiration to her. She was able to perceive the greatness and richness of this art form and strove hard to pull it up from the quagmire into which it was sinking, and in the process had to face a lot of stiff opposition from then prevailing social communities. It was under such a scenario that an institution called ‘Kalakshetra’ was founded by her in the year 1936.

Rukmini Devi had learnt the art directly from her Guru Sri. Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, as was the normal practice in those days. After having established the school, she felt the need for a format for training the students who sought admission in the school. This study has slowly led to the evolution of a technique or a methodology in teaching which has now come to be known as the ‘Kalakshetra Style.”

The ideology on which the teaching pattern is based, can be summarized as follows:

(1) Basic Philosophy:- Kalakshetra has established a basic philosophy, the spiritualness of the art form, be it dance, music, etc., that Natyas akin to ‘Yoga’, that it should be given the excited status of the Vedas. This philosophy was inculcated into the young minds of the students. This stress on the spiritualness of the art is perhaps, a necessity, considering the degradation into which the art was drowned in those days, and also to make it more acceptable to the society which was greatly prejudiced towards this art. Hence, the entire training of the student was built on this philosophy.

(2) Nritta:- The student is first introduced to the basic exercises, i.e. the adavus which is the usual practice everywhere. While training had to be imparted to the students, it became necessary for the teachers to have a clear idea of the working or execution of each basic step or an adavu. Hence, with an expert eye for beauty
4.3.2 The Place of Music in Dance (1992)
Rama Subramoniam

The test of a country’s greatness, its culture and its civilization lies in its fine arts. Art is one of those ideas which evade clear definition. Being abstract in its nature, it does not lend itself to be expressed in concrete things which our logical mind can easily grasp. All the same, several definitions have been given, each having a bearing on some special aspect of culture in its most general sense. Goethe called it “the magic of the soul”. Schiller thought of it as “which gives man his last dignity”. Wagn er, a famous German composer says that “Music is a highest manifestation of the communal life in man”. Many other poets and scholars have given similar descriptions of art.

Viewed from this angle, India emerges as one of the most cultured nations in the world. Art in India has always been considered a path of realization of the ultimate reality. Art in India is a sacred vocation. It was considered a method of approach to God-head. Dance is a composite art enfolding in its range several other fine arts as well. Of course, music goes with the dance. There can be music without dance but no dance without music. Whether it is classical dance, war dance, folk dance or tribal dance, there is always some kind of music in the background. The term “Sangametham” in Sanskrit includes vocal music, instrumental music and dance. Therefore, in Sanskrit, there is no need to mention music and dance separately.

The Natyasastra of Bharatha is the first available work which deals comprehensively with dramaturgy in all its aspects. Seven chapters of the work (Chapters 28 to 34) have been apportioned by Bharatha to music in the theatre. He gives a very detailed account of pure music which has formed the basis for greater works like the “Sangeetha Ratnakaram” of Sambandar. The particular melodies that have to be employed for the production of particular rasas have been explained by Bharata in his work. The description of rasas is very important for dance as the very purpose of dance is the production of rasas, which is called “Rasothpathi” or “Rasanishpathi”.

The above aspect inspired many of the finest musician composers to create exquisite specimens suited for dance. In olden days, patronage from the kings encouraged scholars, musicians and dancers alike. This atmosphere kindled the musicians to compose some of the best ‘padas’ from the melodic standpoint which are aptly suitable for rendering ‘abhinaya’. These padas seem to be ideal for dance owing to the presence of emotional sentiment like spiritual love.

Great composers like Kshetrayya, the musical Trinity, Swati Tirunal, the Tanjore Quartet, Melattur Venkata Rama Sastry, Parandadirasa, Jayadeva, etc., have been the architects of some of the scintillating pieces, captivating the imaginations of the dancers to choreograph. This leaves us with no choice but to believe in the ultimate truth – the inarticulate language of ‘raga’ has the unique power to express more by suggestion, the deepest and the subtlest of the feelings, which articulate words fail to comprehend. Examples of some masterpieces are the Todi varnam, “Roopamu Juchi”, by Muthuswami Dikshitar, and the Huseni Svarajathi by Viswanathye (Shalahar), which have been found to be ideal for dance as they form the basis for greater works like the “Sangeetha Ratnakaram” of Sambandar. The particular melodies that have to be employed for the production of particular rasas have been explained by Bharata in his work. The description of rasas is very important for dance as the very purpose of dance is the production of rasas, which is called “Rasothpathi” or “Rasanishpathi”.

Of course, one can go on driven by one’s own fancy and can come up with various other classes of songs such as Songs about Gods/Goddesses, Songs about People, Songs about his own Life, Songs of Longing and Pleading, etc etc. I shall not bore you with such exercises. But one class does seem to have some merit, namely Songs about Music & Musicians. Thyagaraja composed a number of beautiful songs about music - swaras, tala, laya-, about musicians that he revered, about how music should be sung, about how it originates in the human body as well as the concepts of primordial form of sound and music, namely Nada. The ones that I could identify are: Nada lolu dai (Kalyana Vasantham), Nadopasanache (Begada), Nada Tanum (Chittaranjani), Nada Sudha Rasam (Arabhi), Swara Raga Sudha (Sankarabharanam), Vidulaku Mrokdee (Mayalawagowa), Raga sudha rasa (Anandika), Samaja Varaagnama (Hindolam), Mokshamu Golada (Saramati) and Vararagalyo (Chenchukumbhi). Having spent this much time on getting an idea of the totality of songs that Thyagaraja wrote, let us now look at the Ragaas that he composed in. According to my count, he composed in 215 ragaas. I constructed the following graph to show some of the ragaas in which he composed 10 or more songs.

[Graph]

It is now in our hands to preserve these two art forms as they wade through the complexities of the modern world. It is the duty of the dancers of the twentieth century to see that the qualities of the dancers of the eighteenth century are preserved in the twentieth century. The traditions still continue as the dancers of the twentieth century continue to perform the splendid compositions like the Mohana Kohani Thillana and Charukesi Varnam of the violin maestro Laljadi Sri G. Jayaraman and Sri Balamuralikrishna’s Thillanas and so on. It is now in our hands to preserve these two art forms as they wade through the complexities of the modern world. It is the duty of the dancers of the twentieth century to see that the qualities of the dancers of the eighteenth century are preserved in the twentieth century. The traditions still continue as the dancers of the twentieth century continue to perform the splendid compositions like the Mohana Kohani Thillana and Charukesi Varnam of the violin maestro Laljadi Sri G. Jayaraman and Sri Balamuralikrishna’s Thillanas and so on.
It is interesting to see that Sankarabharanam tops the list, followed by Todi. Were these Thyagarja’s favorite Ragas? In a conversation with Sanjay Subramaniam, he cautioned me about such conclusions: One must keep in mind that these numbers include simpler kirtanas (of which there are quite a few in Sankarabharanam) as well as heavy kritis. If one looks at the weightier compositions, Todi would be first.

Of the remaining, there are:
- 9 kritis each in Asaveri, Bhanta and Surati;
- 8 kritis each in Bilahari and Dhanasi;
- 7 kritis each in Huseni, Kambhoji and Saranga;
- 6 kritis in Nilambodi;
- 5 kritis each in Desya Todi, Gowlipantu, Sri Ranjani, Sudhasaveri and Yamuna Kalyani;
- 4 kritis each in Ahiri, Anandabhairavi, Kannada, Mayamalava Gowla and Narayana Gowla;
- 3 kritis each in Bangala, Devamanohari, Janaranjani, Jayamanohari, Kuntalavarali, Nayaki, Purnachandrika, Parivalkalyani, Sri and Sudha Bangala;
- 2 kritis each in Abhogi, Amir Kalyani, Chakravakam, Chandrachyutti, Chayataram, Garudadhawani, Gowri Manohari, Hansadhawani, Hindolam, Isanamohari, Jagannatharohini, Kansada, Kalovali, Kalyana Vasantam, Kannadagowla, Kottanamani, Kedara, Khamas, Kiranavali, Kokiladhwani, Latangi, Malavasi, Nadanamakriya, Naraoyani, Nata, Natakurangi, Navarasas Kannada, Palamangani, Raguparali, Ravichandrika, Salaga Bhairavi, Sama, Sinhena, Sri, and Sudha Bangala;
- 1 kriti each in all the remaining ragas.

The dance drama Bharati Khanda Bharatam had a lot of folk dances. Its theme involved a social subject - the eradication of caste and creed. People cannot simply accept this subject and usually say “it was not in the classical idiom” -- just a phrase.

In the U.S. there are many dance enthusiasts but not enough teachers to teach them. There are also teachers with only limited experience. As long as you don’t commercialize the art it is okay. If someone who has learned dancing long time ago starts to teach in order to inculcate interest in children, the effort must be appreciated. Of course, you must have a good teacher to expect good result.

After travelling in the U.S. what are you impressions? If possible, we want to get more and more to the American, European and Canadian audiences, because that is where you have to break the barrier and tell them what Indian dance is.

What elements do you find in Western dance that you can appreciate? A lot. First of all, there is the discipline, absolute mastery and control over their body and movements, which we have as Angikabhinaya. This is just one of the 4-fold elements of Indian dancing. What we have is the element of spirituality coming into the dancing.

Do you think that perhaps Indian dancers could do others forms of exercise to strengthen their bodies and improve their stamina? Stamina comes to us with practice. For us, Yoga and dancing is enough.
lovely item?

When you choreograph, it starts as an idea in you. You build it up into a story or choose the right theme. Everything on stage has to be in movement - and movement will be convincing. Almost each aspect is a challenge in itself to depict. When it comes to performance, in a dance drama, you work on a definite theme. You have to portray a definite character, and you have to think like that character. In a solo performance, it is more of the self and the soul coming out, because the themes are like that - devotional.

Does a really good dancer need to be a choreographer to be a true artist?

In order to express yourself completely and wholly, you have to be a choreographer yourself -- at least to the extent of being able to communicate and express what your feelings are. Choreography, when you say it in that specific sense, would require a lot more skill and usually the dancer has to depend on others. But if you would like to concentrate on being a solo performer, it is enough - as long as you are aware of what you are doing and can, if necessary, choreograph. A lot of improvisation has to be done on stage, depending on your mood, the time available and the audience reciprocation. So when you have that freedom to improvise, unless you have the capacity, you cannot make use of it.

What aspects can a dance drama bring out more vividly than a solo performance, and what kinds of bhavas is each capable of arousing in the audience?

A dance drama is spectatorial and arrests the attention. You don’t have to imagine the characters: there are people for every one of them. Anyone and everyone can understand and appreciate them and hence their participation is more. But in a solo performance, a single dancer must portray all characters. She must be good enough to arrange the attention of the audience - especially during a long item like a Varanam.

How can the height to which a really good solo performance compare...

You cannot really compare them in that way. For example, when you read the story of the Ramayana to a five-year-old child, her understanding of the story is different from that of a teenager, an adult, an elderly person or a scholar. When you enact the Ramayana on stage, you must be able to offer something to each one at their level. In a dance drama, you are able to do so. Whereas in a solo performance the person must also have the capacity to receive, especially when it comes to deeper themes like the Nayaka-Nayika expression. But when it comes to sublime enjoyment, it always comes down to the individual’s capacity to understand and receive.

About future trends...

There is a mushrooming of students and teachers, dance dramas, performances on T.V. Does the better awareness include a better understanding of the finer nuances of the art form? Thoroughly, yes. All the students are more inquisitive and want to know what they are doing. We encourage them to ask questions. The audience itself has seen a lot, whether they know more or not. One of the negative points is that they have preformed notions. They would have seen someone dance and liked it, or they would have been told that a particular style is the best. They refuse to see or accept anything else. They must be open-minded and go to performances with knowledge of the basics.

Dancers today are trying to stretch the limit of innovation. At the same time adherence to tradition is a strong instinct. How should they find a balance?

If what you mean by tradition is what has evolved, each style has its own distinct features. As long as you don’t deviate from that, there is no limit to innovation. What these roots are, has to be clear in your mind. When you talk of tradition, take the example of Bharatanatyam, the adavus evolved just 150 years ago. But the dance style evolved 2000 years ago. Again, the Kuchipudi that we see now on stage is only 50 years old. We cannot say it is not traditional. Innovations are always welcome and required to improve the standard of performance.

In what area have you made your boldest experiment?


All the above analysis is based on the available number of kritis, which is 710. What if really Thyagaraja wrote 22,400 kritis? Our results might very well be turned upside down! So, we should be cautious in translating these results to Thyagaraja’s personality and preferences.

Even if one would dispute the 22,400 number, there are 2 very specific issues that I want to bring to your attention. Thyagaraja himself in his own songs refers to (1) Sata Raga Ratna Malika and (2) Kirtana Susatamakam. The first comes from the song “Raga Ratna Malika che” in Ritiswara raga. It refers to a garland of 100 kritis in 100 ragas. Do we know what songs and ragas these are? The second phrase comes from the song “Aparaadhamala noorva” in Vanali raga. In it, he pleads that he, who composed a set of 100 good songs, should be saved. Again, which are these songs? Is it possible that Thyagaraja is using these phrases in a loose way, saying 100 for ‘many’?

Elsewhere I read that Thyagaraja composed in all 72 melakarta ragas. I have to recheck carefully, but I don’t think my collection has them all. Are the others simply lost?

And then there is the question of the dates of various compositions. When did Thyagaraja write which song - date/month/year? At least do we know the sequence in which the songs were written? Which were during his early years, which during his middle age and which when he was a ripe old man? Other than a very few examples, my readings did not reveal much in this direction. Given that Thyagaraja had several students that faithfully copied down the lyrics and avaras of each and every song in a very systematic way, were they not to have noted down the date of compositions in some corner? Or did they? I’d only love to know!

As is often the case, when one begins to ask hard questions about the great man that lived but only 150 years ago – when even photography was available in its early days! – I find myself with more questions than answers. Disheartening at first. But then... sometimes, is it not better to think about some questions rather than be fed with lots of answers? May be.

Finally, I must remind myself that real purpose of music is not to be written about, not to be thought about -- it is to be heard. It is to be affected in one’s body and mind and soul (if there is one). It is to feel the gratitude to Thyagaraja – the creator and to the Musician – for rendering it today; for Providence – for willing us to listen.

If what you mean by tradition is what has evolved, each style has its own distinct features. As long as you don’t deviate from that, there is no limit to innovation. What these roots are, has to be clear in your mind. When you talk of tradition, take the example of Bharatanatyam, the adavus evolved just 150 years ago. But the dance style evolved 2000 years ago. Again, the Kuchipudi that we see now on stage is only 50 years old. We cannot say it is not traditional. Innovations are always welcome and required to improve the standard of performance. If what you mean by tradition is what has evolved, each style has its own distinct features. As long as you don’t deviate from that, there is no limit to innovation. What these roots are, has to be clear in your mind. When you talk of tradition, take the example of Bharatanatyam, the adavus evolved just 150 years ago. But the dance style evolved 2000 years ago. Again, the Kuchipudi that we see now on stage is only 50 years old. We cannot say it is not traditional. Innovations are always welcome and required to improve the standard of performance.

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Gangadharan, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Neyveli Sant anagopalan, M.S. Sheela, Unnikrishnan, Sandhyavan-
danam Srinivasarao and Jon Higgins.

I have been able to record a total of 348 songs on some 25 tapes. If you like to copy them, please do get in

Dr. Prabhakar Chitrapu, a life member of SRUTI, is a former president of SRUTI and is a frequent contributor to
SRUTI’s publications.

4.3. Dance
4.3.1 A Conversation with Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari (1991)
- Anuradha Prabhaskanker

Vasanthalakshmi and Narasimhachari were practicing in the basement with their musicians when I arrived to
interview them. Their two daughters, Lavanya and Layaja, also watched as their parents danced. A close-knit
family of talented dancers, they were warm and friendly. The daughters joined the conversation at the end of
the interview. They revealed that they had done their Arangetram earlier and spoke enthusiastically about
dancing and school. The Narasimhacharas were gracious and talked freely. They responded to the questions
with clarity, using many graphic examples to illustrate a point. Some of the highlights of this interview follow.

Dr. Prabhakar Chitrapu, a life member of SRUTI, is a former president of SRUTI and is a frequent contributor to
SRUTI’s publications.

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