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Ragamalika mangalam

I read with interest the article on *Mangalam* by Sivapriya Krishnan in the July issue of *Sruti*. It is a good informative essay on the subject.

Several years ago, All India Radio, Chennai, had broadcast a feature on 'Ragamalika' which included five ragamalika compositions, all rendered in chorus. The last piece was a unique ragamalika mangalam in eleven ragas composed by Krishnaswamy Iyer (better known as the composer of *Amba Paradevate*). He has dedicated it to his ishta devata, Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai. Its pallavi, anupallavi and the first charanam are set in Khamas, and the following ten charanams in Nata, Gaula, Varali, Sree, Arabhi, Neelambari, Vasanta, Surati, Saurashtram and Madhyamavati—the last four ragas are traditionally considered mangala ragas. The pallavi starts with the words '*Mangalam, mangalam Meenakshikku jaya mangalam*'. He has mentioned his

signature 'Sri Krishna vinuta' at the beginning of the last charanam.

*S. Sankaranarayanan
Mettupalayam*

Nellai Krishnamurthy

The article on Nellai T.V. Krishnamurthy by C. Ramakrishnan deserves compliments for its well compiled biographical account, elegantly portraying the many facets of the artist.

The maestro was once honoured by T.N. Seshagopalan, under the aegis of the Gurukrupa Trust at the Bangalore Gayana Samaja, in Bengaluru. Despite his ill-health, Nellai Krishnamurthy attended the event and delivered a short speech, reminiscing his guru Muthiah Bhagavata's prowess as a vaggeyakara. He recounted an incident which in a way seemed like a spiritual grace behind the valuable opportunities he got in future to mould his musical career in a constructive manner.

A young Krishnamurthy had accompanied his guru for the latter's concert at the Sringeri Sarada Peetham in Karnataka. Barely a couple of hours before the concert, Muthiah Bhagavata was inspired to compose a kriti on the Jagadguru of Sringeri and taught it to his disciple. The kriti was *Jagadguro dayanidhe Sree Sankara Siva krite* (Athana raga, Roopaka tala), which the duo sang in the concert in the presence of the Sringeri pontiff Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati. After the concert, the Jagadguru enquired about his disciple from Muthiah Bhagavata and blessed young Krishnamurthy, predicting a bright future in his musical journey.

*Anil Murthy
Bengaluru*

A query

Who wrote *Radhasameta Krishna* popularised and recorded by GNB? My usual guide *Index of Songs in South Indian Music* by Prof. Gowri Kuppaswamy and Dr. M. Hariharan (R.R. Publishing Corp. Delhi 110052, 1981) says it is Jayadeva's, sourcing it to the collection of songs with the editors. This is wrong, it is not in the *Geeta Govinda*.

Decades ago, GNB's son G.B. Doraiswamy identified the composer but unfortunately I cannot recollect it now. He added a rider: "Many think it is a composition of GNB, but it is not. He composed many songs and he taught a few to some of his students, but he never sang them on stage."

It strikes me now. Is it possible that GNB tuned another's lyric? I wonder who can unravel this mystery now!

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The recording companies of that day, HMV and Columbia, omitted the lyricists' and tunesmiths' names for classical recordings to skip paying royalty. This continued till the time of Annamacharya Sankeertanams recorded by M.S. Subbulakshmi.

V.A.K. Ranga Rao
Chennai

Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar

I enjoyed reading the centenary tribute to maharaja Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar in the July issue of *Sruti*. S.N. Shastry has written an informative article on the life, music and contributions of the composer-king.

It is interesting that Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar and his sister, Vijayarajammani Devi grew up in an environment surrounded by Carnatic, Hindustani and Western music. Wodeyar became a good composer in Carnatic music having composed close to 100 kritis.

Before his coronation, Wodeyar made a trip to Switzerland. There he met Sergei Rachmaninoff and expressed an interest to become his student. During this trip, Wodeyar happened to listen to the works of Nikolai Medtner, a Russian composer. Though Wodeyar never met the composer, he was so much enamoured of his music that he sponsored recordings of his works. In fact, he formed the Medtner Society in 1949 to popularise his music.

Another interesting episode is that the aging Richard Strauss wrote *Four Last Songs*, and expressed his wish in 1949 that the prominent soprano, Kirsten Flagstad should render it. However, Richard Strauss passed away soon after. Coming to know of the composer's last wish, Wodeyar was magnanimous enough to send a generous amount for a live recording of the soprano to perform under the baton of Wilhelm Furtwangler.

Wodeyar was an exceptional musician and a patron of Western classical music.

Ashok Madhav
by email

For the record

I read the articles published in *Sruti*, on the Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamaraja Wodeyar as a birth centenary tribute. The articles by S.N. Shastry, V. Raghavan and Sudharani Raghupathy were well written and nostalgic too! However, I was deeply distressed after reading the article *His Life was not a bed of roses*, written by Sriram V in the July 2019 issue.

Though it is below my dignity to traverse what has been said in the article, yet I would be failing in my duty if I don't do so at least for the sake of the great soul! The writer says: "*First Her Highness it was rumoured, refused to consummate the marriage on discovering that the Wodeyars were of the Yadava caste, and therefore inferior to her....*" This comment is in bad taste!

In Hindu mythology, the Lunar dynasty (Chandravamsi or Somavamsi) is one of the three principal houses of the kshatriya varna, or warrior-ruling caste. Wadiyars are Chandravamsi. According to the puranas, Brahma is self-born in the lotus flower which grew from the navel of Vishnu at the beginning of the universe. Brahma created by the power of his will the Saptarishis to assist him in the creation of the universe. Atri Muni was one of them and his wife Anasuya, bore three famous sons: Dattatreya, Durvasa and Soma. The handsome Soma and Tara had a son called Budha. Suryavamsi Manu's daughter Ila fell in love with Budha, and they had a son named Pururuva who later became emperor and established Prayag as his capital. The Pururuva dynasty was called "Yela" (derived from mother Ila). Yadu is one of his descendants and

from Yadu originated the Yadu dynasty aka Yaduvamsa. Lord Krishna hails from this lineage. A number of Saurashtra royalty like Kutch, Gondal, Morvi, are Kotada-Sangani are Yaduvamsi. For the record, the Wodeyars of Mysore hail from this lineage. The community which abounds in north India with Yadav surnames does not belong to the kshatriya clan of either race as delineated above.

Thus the aspersions cast on the private life of the royal couple is a figment of the mind.

The separation between the first couple took place after a few years of happy married life during which they had a long European sojourn with the rest of the family in 1939 and she became the Maharani in 1940. There are romantic accounts by Mysore Vasudevacharya in his books about the jugalbandi of piano and violin between the couple, wafting down the corridors of the palace daily.

Lastly, when for personal reasons they separated, she was given a mansion in Jaipur, popularly known as Mysore House. She never lived in the Summer Palace after separation as stated in the article. She came to Mysore only after the privy purse was abolished, due to financial constraints, and it was then she stayed off and on. She left Mysore and returned to Jaipur after a while only to return when Maharani Tripurasundarammani passed away in 1982, but she died before she reached the palace.

More such kitsch is written but I will rest my case without much more ado. This should, to some extent, make amends to the damage done to the immortal memory of the late Maharaja.

Raja Chandra
by email

Sangita Kalanidhi title

Sangita Kalanidhi award—how Nobel? The editorial on the Sangita Kalanidhi award in the August

issue of *Sruti* was timely. The award instituted in 1942, is considered as an Oscar for Indian classical music and at par with the Nobel prize. Sangita Kalanidhi, like any other award of its stature, is also fraught with controversies.

The Nobel Committees, while honouring many meritorious scientists, litterateurs and others have also bypassed quite a few who are really deserving. It is unfortunate that inventors like Thomas Alva Edison, who has a string of inventions to his credit and Marconi, who invented the radio, did not qualify for the prize. Even Albert Einstein had to wait for seven years before getting the Nobel Prize. Mahatma Gandhi, a lone crusader of peace in the previous century, did not get the Peace prize. The Sangita Kalanidhi award shares a lot of similarities with the Nobel and Oscar awards, in that, many deserving musicians did not get the award at all and in many instances, have received the award rather late in their career after their juniors had already been bestowed with the title.

A notable omission in the recent past is that of M.D. Ramanathan whose music was quite unique and easily recognised. With his rich, deep voice and a tempo which perhaps none has adopted, he was highly respected as a “musician’s musician”. Though he was a member of the Music Academy’s Experts Committee for many years, he was not selected for the prestigious title. Another glaring omission is that the Academy did not honour the violin maestro and composer Lalgudi G. Jayaraman with the Sangita Kalanidhi. The Academy probably conferred the “Life Time Achievement Award” on Lalgudi, a few years before he passed away to cover up this lapse! Ghatam maestro Vikku Vinayakram, who also was a strong contender for the coveted title, was presented the Life Time Achievement Award.

There is also a feeling that there is a soft corner for Tamil Nadu and

Chennai-based musicians because many times the significant contribution of musicians from the neighbouring states of Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra have gone unnoticed. The last time the Sangita Kalanidhi title was conferred on a musician from Karnataka, was in 1995, when vidwan R.K. Srikantan received the award. Though there are many senior, highly deserving musicians, their services have gone unnoticed during these years. However, many leading artists from Karnataka are recognised and provided opportunities to perform in the prime slots in the annual music festivals conducted by many sabhas in Chennai.

Violinists Mysore M. Nagaraj and Mysore M. Manjunath, have mesmerised audiences across the globe with their remarkable mastery over the instrument and impeccable style of playing. Nagaraj, who is in his late fifties, has the distinction of accompanying several leading artists, past and present, and has rendered more than five decades of service to Carnatic music. It is high time that the contribution of the Mysore Brothers is recognised in a deserving manner.

All these years, musicians from Karnataka had to be content with the Sangita Kala Acharya awards, bestowed on reputed teachers of music. This year too, M.S. Sheela, a leading vocalist from Karnataka has been chosen for the Sangita Kala Acharya award; she is in no way less a contender for the main coveted title.

Outstanding vocalists from Bengaluru like S. Shankar and R.K. Padmanabha, are yet to get due recognition from the Music Academy. Violinist S. Seshagiri Rao, in his early seventies now, has the distinction of providing violin accompaniment to the female trinity of Carnatic music, namely, M.S. Subbulakshmi, M.L. Vasanthakumari and D.K. Pattammal. In a career spanning over six decades, he has accompanied all the leading singers of the past and

the present generation, which includes more than 30 Sangita Kalanidhis. R.K. Padmanabha, an able teacher, administrator, organiser and the main architect behind the tambura-shaped temple at Rudrapatna (a tiny musical village near Hassan) who has a huge following of fans and students across the globe, richly deserves the title.

Musicians from Kerala ignored by the Academy include vocalist K.J. Yesudass, who has established himself as a singer of repute, both in Carnatic music and films. Also, flautist K.S. Gopalakrishnan, who has performed in the annual festivals many times, are awaiting due recognition by the Academy.

Kadri Gopalnath, the musician with “sax” appeal, who adopted an unproven instrument to Carnatic music also remains a strong contender. Unfortunately the music world lost U. Shrinivas, who took the mandolin to unbelievable heights, at a very young age even before he was considered for the title.

The #MeToo campaign has also taken its toll on the conferment of this title since some strong contenders who were accused, are now out of reckoning permanently.

There is a saying, “There may be many who deserve, but all will not get their due”. When there is a long list of achievers and the title limited to only one in a year, the possibility of a truly deserving candidate being sidelined cannot be ruled out. Kanakadasa in one of his compositions *Kashtapattaru illa, kalavalisidaru illa* concludes that *Srishtiyolu kaginele Adi Kesava Raya, kottavarige untu, kodadavarige illa*, meaning: “Any extent of hard work may go unnoticed and one has to take whatever He bestows on us, and if He doesn’t, be content with what we have”. The Sangita Kalanidhi title is no exception.

**S. Shashidhar
Bengaluru**