



Friday Review Thiruvananthapuram

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Songs of devotion

K. GANAPATHI

The Tyagaraja Aradhana in Kalpathy, which was begun in 1924, is celebrated with religious fervour by musicians and music buffs.



MUSICAL TRADITIONS: Vocal concert of Alathur Brothers with T.S.Veeraraghavan on the violin and Palghat Mani Iyer on the mridangam (1950);

The 'Aradhana' of Tyagaraja, one of the Trinity of Carnatic music, is celebrated every year on Pushya Bahula Panchami Day, at Thiruvaiyaru, near Tanjore, where the saint-composer attained samadhi. Musicians and music lovers throng Thiruvaiyaru on the day of the Aradhana to participate in the festivities and pay homage to the saint-composer. The Aradhana is also celebrated with religious fervour and devotion by musicians and music lovers of Palakkad on the same day, at Kalpathy.

How and when the Kalpathy Aradhana festival started is an interesting story. Carnatic musician Palghat Rama Bhagavathar (popularly known as Mundayi Rama Bhagavathar) and mridangam vidwan Chathapuram Subba Iyer (guru of the mridangam wizard Palghat Mani Iyer) used to go to Thiruvaiyaru every year, to participate in the Aradhana celebrations.

The beginning

In 1924, it so happened that they missed the train to Thanjavur and returned to Kalpathy in despair. Consequently, they decided to conduct the Aradhana

at Kalpathy itself. Seshan Bhagavathar, father of Palghat Mani Iyer, and Kalpathy L.S. Viswanatha Iyer (known as Vichanna), yet another guru of Palghat Mani Iyer, concurred with the proposal. Thus, thanks to their initiative and enthusiasm, the Kalpathy Aradhana festival was begun in 1924 at the Rama Dhyana Madom (located at the Hanuman Temple in Kalpathy and founded by Rajaram Swamigal, who is believed to be a disciple of Tyagaraja himself).

The response from the public was encouraging and its popularity grew with every passing year. Almost all the stalwarts of Carnatic music have participated and performed at the festival.

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Group singing of Pancharatna kritis during the Tyagaraja Aradhana festival and

And many an interesting incident finds mention in festival lore. For instance, in 1939, during a concert of Flute Mahalingam (Mali) with Palghat Mani Iyer on the mridangam, an influential person smoked inside the pandal, which evoked protests from the audience.

However, the smoker, by virtue of his position, saw to it that the festival was stopped on that day. However, on account of the sustained efforts of the organisers the festival was resumed immediately.

Octogenarian and Flying Officer (retd.) Rajamani, who was born and brought up in Kalpathy, remembers such instances and also cherishes the many concerts by eminent musicians.

Similarly, T.R.Rajamani, son of Palghat Mani Iyer, recalls a memorable concert by Madurai Mani Iyer. Subba Iyer had organised Mani Iyer's concert during the festival. Palghat Mani Iyer was to have accompanied him on the mridangam. However, Palghat Mani could not reach the venue on time and hence Subba Iyer himself started accompanying Madurai Mani. When Palghat Mani arrived a little later, Subba Iyer requested him to come on stage and play the mridangam. It proved to be a scintillating concert that kept the audience spellbound. Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar who was scheduled to sing next had no objection. And, ultimately, his concert had to be cancelled.

Violinist Swaminathan recalls an occasion when a group rendition of Pancharatna kritis was going on. Chowdiah was on the violin and Subba Iyer was playing the mridangam. Palghat Mani Iyer, who was sitting aside, suddenly grabbed a ganjira and started playing.

Flute Vidwan Nochur Krishna Iyer was running a music school at Rama Dhyana Madom. On his request, the anniversary function of the school was combined with the Tyagaraja Aradhana celebrations, for a few years.

After the demise of Subba Iyer and the other three pioneers, musicians and music lovers have always have come forward to keep the festival going.

Mridangam maestro Palghat Mani Iyer took over the reins of the festival during 1974-75 (approximately) and conducted it admirably for about three years.

Unchavriti

In the Kalpathy festival, prominence is given to Unchavriti. In the past, several leading musicians have taken part in the Unchavriti. Earlier, it used to be conducted for one day. Presently, it has been extended to three days including the Aradhana Day, as more areas are covered. Musicians and music lovers go round the streets of Kalpathy and nearby localities, singing the Saint's compositions. In the group singing of the Pancharatna kritis, a large number of musicians, both male and female, pay homage to the composer.



Unchavriti as part of the Tyagaraja Aradhana in Kalpathy, Palakkad.

The 163rd Aradhana celebrations are scheduled for five days from January 2 to January 6. (With inputs from Flying Officer (retd.) Rajamani, T.R.Rajamani, R.Swaminathan, Flute Krishna Iyer and P.K.Seshadreeswaran)

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