

Sripada Pinakapani

Interview by
G.N.S. RAGHAVAN

Born in August 1913, Sripada Pinakapani is a distinguished singer and musicologist. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award for Carnatic music in 1977 and was conferred the title of Sangeeta Kalanidhi by the Music Academy, Madras, in 1983. In 1984 he received the Presidential award of Padma Bhushan. S. Pinakapani is an M.D. who retired in 1968 as Professor of Medicine, Kurnool Medical College, and was thereafter Professor Emeritus in Medicine.

In this interview, conducted at Kurnool 9–10 February 1993, our conversation turned mainly on (1) the different types of composition in Carnatic music and the scope they afford for melodious rendering; (2) the origin and development of Dr. Pinakapani's interest in music; and (3) the outlook for the preservation and dissemination of the best in the heritage of Carnatic music as it flourished in the early part of this century. A large part of the interview was occupied by Pinakapani's reminiscence and demonstration of the music of veterans of the Tanjore school such as Veena Dhanam; Govindaswami Pillai, the violinist; and the vocalists Mannargudi Rajagopala Pillai, Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer, Mudikondan C. Venkatarama Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Musiri Subramania Iyer. Pinakapani acknowledges with gratitude the guidance to these masters which he received from Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu, the violin maestro, and subsequently from R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, disciple of Veena Dhanam. Snatches of music illustrating the characteristic excellences of the veterans of the Tanjore school were reproduced by Pinakapani with the aid of a notebook in which he had put down the passages in notation as he heard the musicians in person or on the radio 40 years and more ago. This old 'black box' is a precious record of a great musical tradition which is now, except for Pinakapani, virtually extinct. That this record was available, and that Pinakapani was fit enough despite his age to make its contents come alive is good fortune. The video and audio interviews, including the demonstrated musical passages, are available in the archives of Sangeet Natak Akademi. The conversational part is presented here, edited and condensed. In order to avoid distracting footnotes, relevant information has been inserted at places within brackets—GNS.

1

G.N.S. Raghavan: I remember, Dr. Pinakapani, your telling me how, at the beginning of your acquaintance with R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, you once remarked that Veena Dhanam was very good at Padam. "R.R.", you said, "pounced upon me. Does she not render Kritis with the same care and beauty?" By an ironical twist, you yourself came to be typed and referred to, by some, as a good Padam singer. And I find that T. Brinda, a surviving veteran of Dhanam's lineage, also resents this kind of categorization [article in *Indian Express*, 4 October 1992]. What would you say about Padams in relation to other types of composition?

Sripada Pinakapani: Among the items treated on the concert platform are Varnam, Kriti, Padam, Javali and Tillana. These are different architectural designs. There is

no fundamental difference so far as music is concerned. *Raga-Alapana*, or delineation of the raga in which a given item is composed, runs through all of them. We bring the same musical treatment to each type of composition within the scope allowed by it. A piece in slow tempo permits embellishment with much more musical material than a fast-moving one. A composition is like a vessel that can be filled with the *rasa* or quintessence of a raga to its capacity. The *Padam* is a big vessel, like a tanker. The *Kriti* is a relatively small ship or a boat. The *Javali* is like a glass, or you may describe it as a pocket edition of the *Padam*. They all contain the same Ganga water or nectar.

Raghavan: If we are lucky.

Pinakapani: Let us suppose, for the moment, that all performers are good musicians!

The *Varnam* is the first major composition taught to students of Carnatic music [after etudes like *Sarali*, *Janta* and *Datu*, all in one raga, *Mayamalavagowla*, and in one *tala*, *Adi*; *Alankara*, in different *talas*; and *Geetha* in different ragas]. Because the *Varnam* is regarded as a learning piece, even though it is the culmination of the exercises, music instructors do not clothe the *Varnam* with melodic beauty and details. Many present-day *Vidwans*, too, in their public performances render the *Varnam* plainly and present its bare structure, in fast tempo. But the *Varnam* if treated unhurriedly lends itself to high-class musical treatment just as much as a *Padam* or a *Kriti* taken in slow tempo. [Demonstration of the *Adi-tala Varnam*, '*Pankajakshi*' in *Kamboji*.]

Raghavan: This does not seem to me to be any different from a *Padam*.

Pinakapani: Or from a slow-tempo *Kriti* or *Javali*. The same God enters all beings. [Demonstration of snatches from Tyagaraja's *Kriti* '*Endukunirdaya*' in *Harikamboji*, followed by a *Javali*, '*Nareemani neekai*', in *Kamas* which is a *Janya Raga* of, or derived from, *Harikamboji*, and of a *Varnam* in *Kamboji*, also derived from *Harikamboji*.] Can you say this is a *Varnam* and the previous one was a *Javali* or a *Kriti*? [Demonstration of the line '*Vasavadi sakala deva*' from the *Kriti* '*Srisubramanyaya*', in *Kamboji*, by *Dikshitar*.] Look at the distance between one consonant and the other. The interval is meant to be filled with melody. Because *Dikshitar* was a *vainika*, he knew what *Gamaka* was more than most vocalists. He composed his songs in slow tempo, permitting *Gamakas*, and that was the way he played on the *Veena*. Quickened the pace, and you drive out beauty. The *Kritis* then sound like *Veda parayana*. [Demonstration of the destructive effect of plain structure and quick tempo on the *Javali* '*Neematalu emayenu*' in *Poorvikalyani* and, in contrast, the way the *Javali* can be rendered melodiously.]

Raghavan: I suppose, sir, some would say that this is too much!

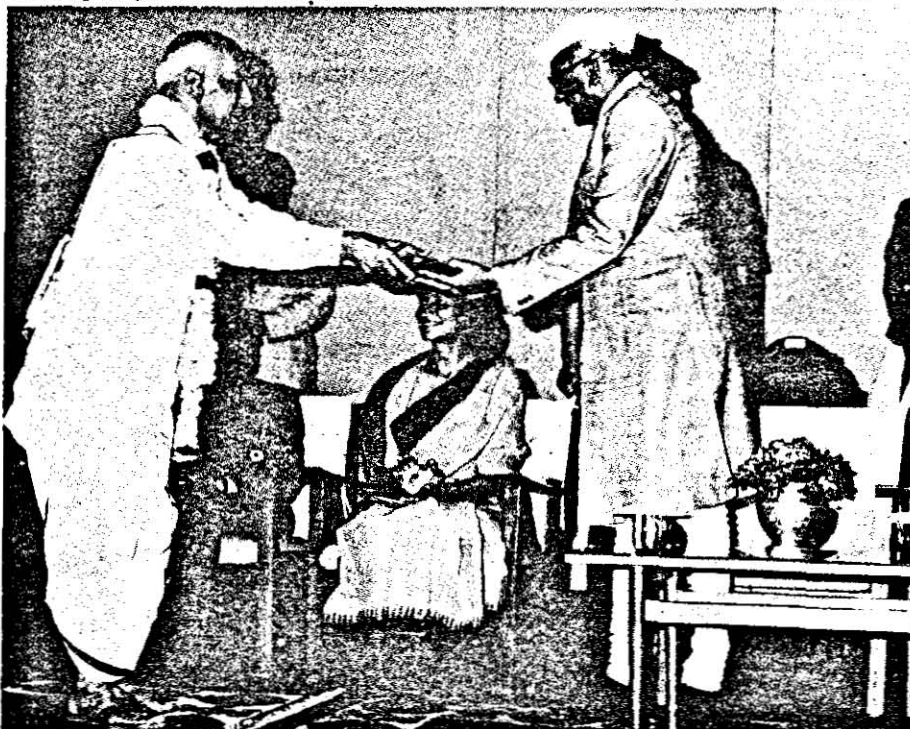
Pinakapani: When it is sung plainly, I will say there is too little. How much is too much? I will tell the critic: I do not quarrel with you. But I shall introduce as much as I can when I sing. How much is proper depends on the musician's capacity.

Raghavan: And on the level of the taste of the listener.

Pinakapani: Yes, and on the scope that the raga and the composition afford.



Receiving Sangeet Natak Akademi Award from Shri N. Sanjeeva Reddy, President of India



Tillanas, for instance, are mostly composed and sung these days in quick tempo because they are intended for Nritya by dancers; the Padam, on the other hand, is considered suitable for Abhinaya. But a Tillana rendered in slow tempo can be as great, musically, as any other type of composition. [Demonstration of a Tillana composed by Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer in Poorvikalyani, and of another in Faraz.]

The Tillana is no different from a small Kriti, Javali or Padam. All these are different containers that can be filled with the same music. Running through all of them, if rendered well, is the *raga-bhava* like the string in a pearl necklace.

2

Raghavan: Would you say that the masters of the Tanjore school in the early part of this century rendered every type of composition with the relish or bliss of *raga-bhava* or melody—whatever we may call it? Your music is full of this. How did you acquire it? Could you recount how your interest in music began, and how it was shaped?

Pinakapani: My father's interest in music was the origin. Sripada Kameswara Rao, that was his name, was a junior professor of education in Government Arts College, Rajahmundry. Drama, in which music was a vital part those days, was my father's hobby. He put my elder sister, about six years my senior, under musical instruction when I was five or six. The guru's name was B.S. Laxman Rao. A Mysorean, he was not a professional musician but was a teacher in the Government Model High School where I was studying.

Every day I would sit by the side of my sister and listen while she learnt. This went on for two or three years. One day she happened to make a mistake while singing. It seems—my mother told me later—I blurted out, "That is wrong". This surprised the teacher, who asked me to point out what was wrong, and to render it right. I happened to sing it correctly. Surprised and pleased, he pressed my father to put me too under regular music tuition. "I am not a girl, to learn music!", I said. My mother asked me, "Is not your teacher a man?" It seems I argued that he had learnt music in order to teach others, and I did not intend to be a music teacher. It was several years later, in 1924, when I was studying in the Second Form of middle school, that I started taking regular lessons from B.S. Laxman Rao. He was my first guru.

My father would take me to dramatic performances given at Rajahmundry by touring professional troupes, and I closely followed the songs rendered by the actors. I tried to reproduce them exactly, and it perhaps helped to shape my voice. I also learnt songs rendered on gramophone records by musicians like Subbiah Bhagavathar, Coimbatore Thayee, Bangalore Nagaratnamma and Ponnuswami Pillai on the Nagaswaram. I would go to the Godavari bund in the evenings and practise singing. I happened to hear on the gramophone some Hindustani singers too, and I was attracted in particular by the rendering of '*Shyama sundara*' in Tilang by Narayanrao Vyas. I took down the entire song in swara and learnt to sing

it exactly the same way.

Raghavan: You could notate even at that stage?

Pinakapani: My teacher gave me a sound grounding both in *laya* and *swara*. On my showing him my initial attempts at notation, he corrected and guided me.

Raghavan: With this engrossment in music, did not your school education suffer?

Pinakapani: No, I was good at studies. In almost every class I was one of the top three students. My music lessons continued till I went to Kakinada, 40 miles from Rajahmundry, for the Intermediate college course.

Raghavan: Why did you not go to college at Rajahmundry itself?

Pinakapani: My father as well as my elder brothers felt that, at college stage, I should concentrate on my studies.

Raghavan: And that you should therefore be separated from your guru!

Pinakapani: Yes, at least for some time. I had no formal instruction in music while at Kakinada. But I would attend the concerts organized during the Dussehra season by the Saraswati Gana Sabha. I heard the stalwarts who came from the south such as Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar, the leading singer of the time on the concert stage; Nayana Pillai, whose forte was *laya*-calculation during *swaraprasthara*; and Dakshinamurti Pillai, percussionist on the Kanjira and Mridangam. I was greatly impressed by and wanted to model myself after Ariyakudi with his full-throated voice and the employment of *gamakas* and *anuswaras* in the presentation of ragas and Kritis. The feel of a raga was all for him: there was no intrusion of the beat of the *laya* or of the words, when he sang. [Demonstration of the line 'Mattikundakante' in Patnam Subramania Iyer's Kṛiti 'Etunamminavo', in Saveri.]

The next landmark was my introduction to Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu. I was in Rajahmundry during a vacation, and the violin maestro had come there to give a solo performance. My guru, who knew Dwaram, took me along and asked him whether he would agree to impart higher training to a student of his to whom, over a period of five years, he had taught about a hundred Kritis. Dwaram must have been amused to see a small youngster—I was a short fellow, four feet nine inches or so—who was credited with having learnt a hundred Kritis. But he agreed to my guru's proposal, and suggested that I might be sent during a summer vacation to Vizianagaram.

In December 1930 my parents undertook a pilgrimage to Rameswaram. I requested them to take me with them to Madras and drop me there, so that I could attend the music festival during Christmas. They agreed, and I was left at Madras in the care of my aunt. It was then that I first heard Musiri Subramania Iyer and his *neraval*—the varied musical treatment, with a wealth of *sangathis*, of the words occupying one or two *avartanas* of the tala in which a composition is set. This was not in vogue in Andhra during those times. I did not know till then how melodiously *neraval* could be done. Musiri would render it in a slower tempo than others, and with clear intonation and good effect. [Demonstration of the line 'Paranjoti needu' from a Kṛiti in Todi by Anai Ayya.]

I was so affected by Musiri's melodious rendering of this line that its haunting

beauty came back to me when I called on him in Madras, along with my wife, in December 1983 when the title of Sangeeta Kalanidhi was conferred on me by the Music Academy. As we passed through the gate and approached Musiri, who was seated on a chair in the verandah, I went up singing '*Paranjoti needu*'. He stretched out his hands in welcome, exclaiming *besb, besb*, with tears in his eyes. I bowed to Musiri and told him that he was my guru in the rendering of *neraval*.

As the concert series of 1930 in Madras drew to a close I went to see Dwaram who was staying at Mylapore. He had given a solo performance the previous evening. When I told him that I was leaving Madras the next day, he asked: "Must you go? Can't you stay another day?" He went on to say: "There is an old lady called Dhanammal. She is going to give a private performance on the Veena tomorrow. She is a rare musician, and her type of Veena music cannot be heard by you hereafter. Listen to her and then go." I jumped at the idea.

Dhanam's performance—it was chamber music—was arranged at the residence of K.S. Jayarama Iyer, a leading criminal lawyer whose wife was a music enthusiast and patron. Their home was a haven for professional musicians. Just about a half dozen persons were present besides myself: the Veena player Achyutarama Sastri, father of Emani Sankara Sastri; a burly figure who was probably T.N. Rajamanickam Pillai, the violinist; and R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar (though I did not know his identity at the time). There was no Tambura accompaniment, and Dhanammal would occasionally vocalize. Jayammal, her daughter, was by her side. The two hours of the music I found exquisite. I had not heard Veena music of that kind before, nor have I heard it since. I listened later to gramophone records of Dhanam, and was enthralled by the Varnam in Begada and the Padam '*Padakintikika*' in Mohanam. That Padam and the Varnam taught me the two ragas at their best.

After completing the Intermediate course at Kakinada, I spent the summer vacation of 1932 at Vizianagaram. I stayed in Dwaram's house for three months and picked up all that I could from the music-saturated atmosphere that prevailed during all the waking hours. Besides guiding his students, Dwaram would himself play for three hours every day. I added to my stock of Kritis, and concentrated my attention on the procedure of raga *alapana* and Pallavi. One day, while Dwaram was playing, I involuntarily exclaimed *sabash* at one of the many beauty spots. This was audacious, considering the difference of 20 years in age between us. "Pani", he said, "you are a learner, and not an ordinary listener who might say *sabash*. Listen attentively." And when I could not restrain another *sabash*, Dwaram stopped and asked me what he had played. I sang that particular bit. He smiled, as if saying to himself, 'The fellow is getting it'.

Early in May 1932, when I was taking leave of Dwaram, he advised me: "You want to study medicine. If you get admission to the Madras Medical College, listen to Ariyakudi, and the Nagaswaram *vidwans*. If you join the medical college at Visakhapatnam, attend the annual Gana Sabha series and hear the southern masters when they come there to perform. And, whenever you can, come here to me."

There were only two medical colleges at the time in Madras Presidency. I secured



With Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer

During a recording at the Cuddapah station of All India Radio, accompanied by Palghat Mani Iyer on the Mridangam and K. Subrahmanyam on the Violin



admission at Vizag, where I kept up the regular hearing and practice of music.

Raghavan: M.B.B.S. is a tough course. How did you find the time for music?

Pinakapani: There was no difficulty because I was fairly good at my studies. When the annual examinations approached, I would stop singing for four months. The rest of the year there was plenty of time. In the evenings I would go first to the gymnasium because I was keen on body-building, and then proceed to the beach with my class-mate and close friend, Brahmayya Sastry, for music practice. Among the Tamil musicians who performed at Vizag, I was greatly impressed by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer who came in 1936. I got by heart his gramophone rendering of Papanasam Sivan's '*Navasiddhi Petralum*' in Karaharapriya, in which Semmangudi treated each of the six *charanas* differently and creatively. Subsequently I learnt all the compositions of Sivan that were available on discs.

In the final year of the M.B.B.S. course we had to go to Madras for training in maternity cases, since there were not enough facilities at Vizag. I stayed in a hostel at Madras for about three months, and this was a golden opportunity for hearing the masters of the *dakshinadi bani*. It was during this sojourn at Madras that I met R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar who was to prove a most important and vital source of music-learning for me. A disciple of Dhanam's Tanjore style, R.R. too was an amateur like me and not a professional musician, being a teacher at the Muthiah Chettiar High School. It was as if providence put me in touch with him in 1938, saying: You have done only the high-school stage of music education so far. Go now for the graduate and post-graduate stage to a gentleman known as R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, and he will guide you.

Our encounter happened this way. One day as I was walking along the main road in Egmore, I heard someone clapping his hands. Turning round, I saw him beckoning to me. Though elder to me, he asked to be excused for the unusual way of inviting my attention: he did not want to shout! R.R. had noticed me, a youngster of 24, at some of the Friday recitals of Dhanam at her house where he was a regular visitor. One of his disciples who knew me had told him that I was a keen student of music and had a large repertoire.

"It seems", he said to me, "that you know a Kriti by Tyagaraja in Ahiri. I would like to take it down." I replied that the Kriti, which began with the words '*Deenarakshaka*', was not by Tyagaraja and was perhaps by Ponniah Pillai, but I would be happy to share it with him. This marked the beginning of a close association, till his death in 1980, which helped to mould me as a musician to what I happen to be today.

Soon afterwards, in 1938, I gave an audition at the Madras station of All India Radio which was coming up in a converted residential building in Egmore. I was accepted. In those days the broadcasts were live, not pre-recorded. My recital was put down for October 1938. I was to write my final examinations in December. My professor of medicine, Dr. Kutumbaiah (he had a radio set in his house) was hardly likely to approve of my going to Madras and giving a recital with the examinations just two months away. I therefore, wrote to the A.I.R. station at Madras to request that the recital may be ascribed to 'Vasant' rather than me by my real name. They

were good enough to agree to use the pseudonym.

My first public performance was in September 1939, soon after I graduated as a doctor. It was under the auspices of the music *sabha* at Visakhapatnam. Mysore T. Chowdiah was to perform the next day, and the train timings were such that he had to reach Vizag a day earlier. He was brought to the concert hall about half an hour after I had begun and when I was doing *swarakalpana* in Bilahari, in the course of the song '*Paridana micchithe*' by Patnam Subramania Iyer. I was not a known figure, and Chowdiah looked at me with a mixture of curiosity and appreciation. When, at the conclusion of my recital, I got down from the platform and went to greet him, Chowdiah himself came towards me with folded hands and congratulated me. I was extremely glad that my parents were present to witness this happy occurrence. Chowdiah said words to the effect: We professionals spend our lifetime to get these things which you, an amateur, have got at a young age. And he went on to say: "Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu brought fame to Andhra. I am sure you too will do so. Please come over to Mysore next month and sing during the Dusserah festival." I thanked him, but was not sure whether the invitation was seriously meant. While he was being taken by a taxi to the railway station at the conclusion of his recital the next day, Chowdiah called out to me: "Doctor, remember to come. You will stay with me at Mysore."

I did go. But a brother of the Maharaja died, and the festivities were cancelled that year. Chowdiah therefore arranged a recital by me at the Ram Mandir music hall. At its conclusion he paid me a compliment that overwhelmed me: "I made a mistake. I should have accompanied you."

The most thrilling benediction was to come from Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar at the annual Tyagaraja *aradhana* at Tiruvaiyyaru which I attended in 1944. I rendered three items during my 45 minute recital, on the fourth day of the music festival. At its conclusion I was on my way to take a bus for Tanjore when Ariyakudi, coming from the opposite direction, hailed me and, putting his hand on my shoulder, expressed his appreciation of my music. I asked him how he could have heard me, since he was coming from the other side just then. Ariyakudi told me that he had heard me on the loudspeaker in the booth at the organizing committee's office, in the company of S.Y. Krishnaswami and some other members of the committee. Still unconvinced—I must have been in a bad mood—I persisted: "What, sir, did I sing?" After mentioning the items I had sung, Ariyakudi said: "All these Vidwans, who sing here, are scholars all right, each singing in a manner of his own. As I heard you, I noticed that you have imbibed the genuine, wholesome Tanjore style. May God bless you with long life." I was thrilled further when he added that S.Y.K. had asked him, in the booth, whether the singer was a disciple of his [Ariyakudi's].

Raghavan: It must have been a great moment in your young life.

Pinakapani: It still is. I received encouragement also from G.N. Balasubramaniam, the speed king of his generation. I met him in 1944 at Madras, where I was posted as an assistant surgeon in the General Hospital. After hearing my rendering of '*Emani pogadudura*' in Veeravasantham, G.N.B. took it down from me in notation

and would subsequently greet me, when I met him, with that opening line of the song.

He said it was too late to include me in the annual December series of concerts during Christmas that year, but would I sing in one of the Music Academy's monthly performances? I readily agreed. It was arranged in Kesari Kuteeram, Mylapore. The audience included Prof. Sambamurthy, the musicologist, M.L. Vasantakumari (at that time a teenager) along with her mother, R.R. Ayyangar, and G.N.B. himself who, though running a high temperature, came and sat through the recital, wrapped in a shawl. But I heard nothing further from the Music Academy. It was perhaps a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. I was in far-away Andhra from 1946.

3

Raghavan: You heard some of the great exponents of the Tanjore style who flourished in the first half of this century. Whom would you rate as the best among them?

Pinakapani: It is impossible to identify any one person as the best, because each of them was supreme in his own way. I tried to imbibe the excellence unique to each of them.

I owe my introduction to these masters to R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar. He would tell me anecdotes of veterans of a previous generation like 'Poochi' Srinivasa Ayyangar [1860-1919], Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer [1878-1920], and Simizhi Sundaram Iyer [1876-1927]. These accounts were fascinating. But of more practical import was the guidance he gave me as to the excellences to look for in performing musicians still living, specially Mannargudi Rajagopala Pillai, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer. All the Sangathis that I sing in a Padam or other type of composition are, I imagine, derived mainly from these three.

There were of course other sources of inspiration. For example Govindaswami Pillai, the violinist. His communication of *raga-bhava* while rendering Kritis attracted me next only to Ariyakudi's. Govindaswami Pillai's violin music approximated closely to the vocal style. [Demonstration of the line '*Alakalamudunu*' from the Tyagaraja Kritis '*Merusamana*' in Mayamalavagowla.]

Listeners would sway from side to side as they heard the rhythmical cadence. I cannot imagine a better way of rendering. And Govindaswami Pillai was greatly influenced by Dhanammal. In fact, when I illustrate Govindaswami Pillai I am illustrating Veena Dhanam, and *vice versa*.

Another musician who made a profound impression on me was Swaminatha Pillai on the flute. R.R. had advised me to observe how, when Swaminatha Pillai did *swarakalpana*, he arrived at the *edupu*, as they call it in Tamil, or *jagah* as we say in Telugu, so beautifully that you did not know when it had happened. So smooth was the landing.

Of course, when I sing, I am not conscious that this comes from one man or that from another; my singing is my own. But the sources of inspiration I can never forget, nor the person who guided me to those sources. I think that R.R. accepted me as a worthy *shishya* when he remarked to me, after the recital at Kesari Kuteeram at Madras in 1944: "So far as music is concerned you are not an Andhra, you are a Tamil."

R.R. advised me to note in particular the way in which Mannargudi Rajagopala Pillai of Tiruchi handled *raga alapana*. Some of the best gems lie buried deep in the ocean. Mannargudi was not in the market afforded by Madras city for professionals. I could hear him only on radio, whenever he sang from Tiruchi station. What a master he was in the delineation of raga! There was a patterning and symmetry of phrases that are not heard nowadays. When he took up Yadukulakamboji, we never felt that the scope of the raga was limited; its universe seemed as large as that of Todi. Mannargudi never employed a *birka*—which has no intrinsic beauty—for its own sake or as the mainstay; he would follow up a *birka* with a phrase imbued with melody, so that the whole was suffused with beauty. When Mannargudi sang Saveri, there was no straight line connecting the *swaras*. It is the circuitous route that leads to the beauty of melody, not a straight march through the *swaras*.

As for Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, there was none to equal him in his day if he was in the right mood. And when would he be in such mood? When the audience was small and consisted of genuine musicians—a chamber concert and not a public performance to which ticket-holders go for thrills and clap their hands as at a football match. Maharajapuram rendered relatively small ragas like Darbar in such a way that they sounded like Melakarta ragas. Such was his creativity that he gave them an amplitude as large as that of the major ragas of unlimited scope. He treated Darbar as none has done either in the previous generation or now, weaving *swaras* around *shadjam* only. He would get lost in the raga, not bothered about the platform, the accompanist, or the audience. Other ragas that he treated superbly were Mukhari, Arabhi, Bilahari and Mohanam. He employed the *birka* only as an embellishment in the service of *gamaka*.

Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer was the third great influence on me. R.R. had told me to observe intently his handling of *tanam*. Done speedily, as most singers and Veena players do today, *tanam* lacks the beauty of raga-soaked phrases. Present-day musicians do not know what to do with a note when they dwell on it. Mudikondan, on the other hand, filled the space between the consonants with a profusion of beautiful *gamakas*.

When a singer these days attempts *tanam*, we hear only the consonants: *tham thom tho nantha*; and if it is a Veena player we have ceaseless right-hand strokes on the string and little activity of the left hand. This is a travesty of *tanam*. I do not blame them, because better ways of rendering *tanam* have not been pointed out to them by their mentors. They have not been guided rightly. Voleti Venkateswarlu, one of the finest musicians of Andhra, once asked me to teach him *tanam* by looking into the exercise notebook in which I had noted down some passages from Mudikondan. As he took down the phrases, Voleti exclaimed that it felt as if one

was looking up at a great mountain!

Many of today's singers mangle Kritis, as they mangle *tanam*, by adopting an unduly fast tempo. It is as if they want to accompany the percussionist rather than let him be their accompanist. For example, Tyagaraja's Kritis 'Sriraghukulamandu' in Hamsadhwani, taken in slow tempo, can be a thing of beauty. But the contemporary performer sings it at high speed, entering the realm of the percussionist and competing with him on his terms. [Demonstration of 'Sriraghukula' in slow tempo.]

Raghavan: But, sir, this takes some doing. How many can do it?

Pinakapani: It will get done if there are gurus who practise this style and teach it to their students, and if there are listeners who ask for it. The generality of today's singers need to be told: You are singing like a student; sing like a Vidwan. [Demonstration of a passage from Mudikondan's rendering of a composition in Chakravakam illustrating the combination, in one phrase, of *swaras* both from the *arohana* and *avarohana*.] You see how he creates the effect, as in fanning, of a to-and-fro movement that produces the desired breeze. This type of musical phrasing we do not hear now. They sang and they died. Their music went waste.

Raghavan: That remark brings me to a central question: What is the outlook for the preservation and dissemination of the best in the Carnatic musical heritage, which you heard and imbibed?

Pinakapani: For the propagation of a style of music, requisite in the first place is the presentation of all the material by a singer; then audiences listening to it, musicians listening, and students gathering the material and absorbing it. You have been hearing me from 1964 onwards, and you must have noticed that there is no other person, no *shishya* of mine, who sings in this style.

Raghavan: I know. It is only too true.

Pinakapani: My disappointment is that I was neglected by the music Sabhas of the Tamil country, the heartland of that very Tanjore style that I cultivated and which I wanted to bring into Andhra. Had they given me opportunities to sing, more people in the South would have listened and they might have been reminded of their own pristine heritage. There should have been by now at least five or six musicians who would have imbibed this style of singing. It did not happen.

Raghavan: But surely all is not lost. We now have recording devices that can keep the sound of music alive even after the singer's time, apart from the technology for printed dissemination of notated music. At what stage is the project for bringing out your repertoire of songs in notation?

Pinakapani: The Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams have been good enough to undertake the printing of the notation of more than a thousand compositions, of different types, that I have put down over the years. The publication, under the title *Sangeeta Sourabham*, will be in four volumes. I have started receiving the proofs of the first volume.

Raghavan: How will it be different from the *Kritimanimala* series already brought out by R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar?

Pinakapani: That is a good question. R.R. was a *vainika*, and he notated the music for the guidance of Veena players, complete with all the details of how *gamakas* and *anuswaras* should be attempted on the Veena. This made it difficult for aspiring students who were not Veena-players. Potential learners found the series intimidating rather than inviting. For the singer who does the same *sangathi* so much detail is perhaps not necessary. Being a vocalist, I have put down in notation only the essentials.

Raghavan: Will *Sangeeta Sourabham* include the Kritis of Annamacharya which you have set to music, and several of which you have sung for me over the years?

Pinakapani: Yes, it will. I have included 105 Kritis of Annamayya set to music by me in 79 ragas, including some difficult *vivadi* ragas like Yagapriya and Raghupriya.

Of the total of 1094 compositions which will appear in the four volumes, 56 are Varnams. Of these, five are Varnams which I have composed. Four of these are in ragas in which there is no Varnam extant: Hindolam, Karaharapriya, Ritigowla and Varali. The fifth is in Kalyani. Though there is already a Kalyani Varnam, widely sung, in Adi-tala, I wanted to try and create another which should not be inferior in musical quality to the Ata-Tala Varnam in Kalyani composed by Pallavi Gopaliah. [Demonstration of the opening passage of Pinakapani's Varnam in Kalyani.] One of my students, who did not know by whom the composition was, said on hearing it: "It is like Pallavi Gopaliah's Varnam." That precisely was my objective.

Among the Kritis included in *Sangeeta Sourabham* are 340 by Tyagaraja and as many as 173 by Dikshitar. Few even in the South and among Dikshitar specialists might have collected so many. It happened this way. The year 1975 was the second birth centenary of Dikshitar, and almost every recital from the radio stations of south India contained at least one or two compositions of Dikshitar. This was at the request of the Station Directors. I used to sit at the radio and record these compositions on tape; I then rendered them in notation. Earlier I had known hardly 25 of Dikshitar's Kritis.

Of the Kritis of Syama Sastri and his son Subbaraya Sastri there are 35 in my work. There are about 20 more, but I do not know them.

There are 44 Padams, collected by me from wherever possible. Most of them I have learnt from R.R. in the Dhanam style. There are an equal number of Javalis. This type of composition was born in the Telugu land, and Javalis are sung elsewhere, too, mainly in Telugu. There must have been good Padam singers in Andhra, but the memory of their singing is now extinct and we can get Padams only from the Dhanam school of Brinda and Mukta. I could gather some 40, and I have put down the Padams in notation as rendered by them.

Also included are ten Tillanas, by the great composers of the past. I have not taken the street Tillanas of the present day, which are meant only for dancers. Finally, there are 16 Tiruppugazh songs, some of them set to interesting *anga-talas*.

Raghavan: Will not the usefulness of *Sangeeta Sourabham* be increased greatly if the printed volumes are backed up by cassettes of your renderings of some items from each of the different types of composition included in each volume? Together,

the printed work and the cassettes should help to keep alive the old Tanjore bani that you personify. Even if the Telugu script of *Sangeeta Sourabham* is a limiting factor, the cassettes at any rate can be made available to all institutions teaching Indian music.

Pinakapani: If it is done, that will be wonderful.

Raghavan: I hope I will live to see it being done.

Pinakapani: Certainly, but I wonder if I can say the same thing!

Raghavan: That impels me ask you what you feel after a life-long striving for perfection in music: regret, at the apparent loss of a precious heritage, or fulfilment in terms of self-realization?

Pinakapani: Both, I would say. I feel sorry that the quality of music which attracted me is no longer in vogue. But that is only at one level. When I sing, and most of the time that is what I do, for my own *vimukti* or liberation, I am content.

Raghavan: Dr. Pinakapani, I thank you for your cooperation in this effort by the Sangeet Natak Akademi to document you.

Pinakapani: Let us thank providence for making this possible. □