

Raga Dhana of Udupi turns 25

The number of Carnatic music performers on AIR Mangalore in 1988-89 was barely a dozen. Udupi perhaps boasted only a couple of Carnatic musicians, while of Hindustani musicians, there were none. We had to import artists from across the Western Ghats. The remuneration and the travelling expenses would swell to a grand sum and few organisers could invite and look after such artists. The people here had no folk art except Yakshagana. They were busy in banking or agriculture or fetching good marks in examinations so that they could earn a fortune. Classical artists learnt and without competing with anybody found solace for their souls and comfort elsewhere. They did not dare to settle in their hometown, as it never catered to their interests. Hundreds of years passed by in this manner. The west

coast of Karnataka was a veritable 'wasteland' for classical music.

Raga Dhana identified this 'genetic syndrome' and started working on it with genuine effort in 1989. It started with a pigmy scheme called Griha Sangeetha. It invited those who aspired to render music on the

Ranjani Hebbar



stage, with or without a mike. It started to rear such talents by giving them opportunities and having their performances reviewed by local newspapers like *Udayavani*.

A. Ishwarayya, then editor-in-chief of the magazine section of the paper, came forward to do this. The executive committee members of Raga Dhana toiled to promote art in the right direction. The Griha Sangeetha stage spread confidence among our local artists. They started listening to the concerts of other artists, with the objective of improving. But the improvement was not easy. There was no shortcut, no substitute for hard work. Music training camps, lecdems, and workshops that Raga Dhana and other organisations arranged in different parts of the districts of our west coast, by renowned senior



Ranjani-Gayatri (vocal), Vittal Rangan (violin) and Arunprakash (mridangam)

Ranjani-Gayatri duo gave a spotless rendering of every kriti they handled. Their scholarly Ranjani raga-tanam-pallavi was satisfying in its fullness. Young Vittal Rangan on the violin was very adept in every bit he played. Arunprakash was composed as ever lending a transporting felicity to everything rendered by the duo.

The festival featured a Hindustani recital too on 2nd February by Ustad Faiz Khan, Bharath Hegade, Gurumurthy Vaidya. The ragas Multani and Gavati in his reverberating voice were very absorbing. His rendering of Dasa Keertanas was very meditative and carried a telling effect of what the Dasas communicated in their lyrics.

A notable concert in the Utsav was the featuring of an extraordinary talent of a tiny duo of Udupi who were nick named the Latangi Sisters by the audience, though they are not sisters. Samanvi and Archana, respectively 6th and 8th standard students, reminded us of Ranjani Hebbar with their soulful rendering of *Bhuvaneshwariya* (Mohanakalyani), *Kaddanuvavari* (Todi), *Sada enna hridayadalli* (Brindavanasarangam) and *Jo Jo*

Sreekrishna (Kurinji). Equally competent was Gargi of Udupi (B.Sc. student) who with her mellifluous voice sang a memorable Sankarabharanam. An hour and half video show – *Maardani* – marked a heart-warming tribute to Ranjani Hebbar. An ensemble choir on raga Marva directed by Ustad Rafiq Khan, was a result of rigorous training imparted to a set of school children, was worth watching. A dance recital directed by Nandini Eshwar of Mysore featured at the end of the festival demanded more attention for making it successful.

The guests of honour in the valedictory were V. Ramnarayan, editor-in-chief of *Sruti* magazine,

and Dr. Gowri Ramnarayan, veteran journalist and playwright. They paid tributes to the evocative music of Ranjani Hebbar and commented on the current state of Carnatic music. Captain Dr. Ganesh Karnik, an MLC with a difference, has a tender heart for pure classical music, which was evident in his speech. A. Ishwarayya, the president of Raga Dhana, V. Aravinda Hebbar, Secretary, and K Sadashiva Rao, Treasurer, were on the stage painting a lucid picture of the rugged path Raga Dhana has traversed through these 25 years.

V. ARAVINDA HEBBAR
(A music teacher and composer)

Samanvi and Archana

