

NEDUNURI KRISHNAMURTHY

A voice with soul

Sangita Kalanidhi Nedunuri Krishnamurthy is no more. The veteran exponent of the Pinakapani bani, a role model for young vocalists, was 87 when he passed away at Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Monday, 8th December 2014. He was ailing from lung cancer.

Nedunuri leaves behind an impressive brand of vocalism, exemplified by his prime disciples the Malladi Brothers. His music was soulful, steeped in classicism, and had a lingering quality to it.

He was the recipient of several prestigious awards including the Sangita Kalanidhi and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi award.

With his tremendous work on tuning the songs of Annamacharya, Nedunuri leaves behind a rich legacy of both great singing and devoted academic work.

Sruti published a cover story on Nedunuri Krishnamurthy in February 1992 (*Sruti* 90). His interviews have also been published in later issues of the magazine.

SAMUDRI



S. SANKARANARAYANA

Shaping our understanding of art

A slow *Ma Ga Sa* phrase provides a meditative beginning to the Kedaragaula alapana. Following it up with a *Ri Ma Ga Sa* phrase, the vidwan then goes on to explore the ragam in all its regal glory. He takes his time, explores the mandra sthaya and expansively sings sancharas below the panchama. The multitude of ways in which he expresses *Ri Ma Pa* notes pushes us to the tether of our imagination, and gives a sneak peek into the intellect of this erudite musician. I am enraptured by a particular usage of *Ri Ma Pa*, where he intelligently mixes syllables, voice modulation and raga bhava to produce an electric effect that sounds like “*rm-mp-pddp*” in the fast speed, but this swara reproduction pales in comparison to the effect when the vidwan sings this phrase. The alapana then progresses in pace and length of passages when

he moves to the nishada and tara sthaya shadja.

After an exciting passage at *Ni*, where he explores multiple ways of exploring the Kedaragaula nishada, the alapana hits a crescendo at the tara sthaya rishabha, with a flurry of brigas, exciting phrases and poignant pauses. When the doyen finishes and rests at *Sa*, I hear spontaneous applause coming in from the radio. I then switch off the radio. For, I want to soak in the powerful, emotive music that we have come to associate with Nedunuri Krishnamurthy.

Students of music like me, were privileged to listen to him live, witnessing his artistry and erudition, and collecting a wealth of his recordings. My guru Neela Ramgopal always tells me that music is to be imbibed, absorbed, and internalised. She often alluded to the sheer purity

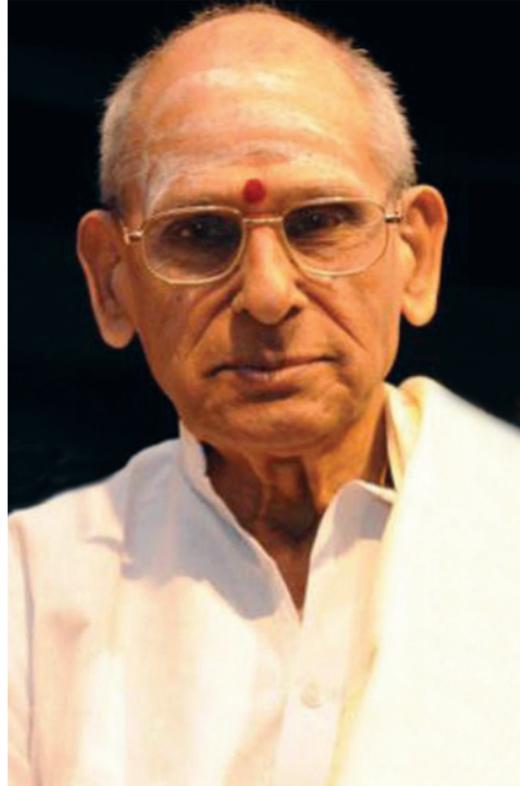
of rendition of Nedunuri garu’s music a purity that she said went much beyond the realm of the voice.

Listening to the music of Nedunuri Krishnamurthy has changed my understanding of several aspects of the art. His renditions of such classical ragas as Bhairavi, Dhanyasi and Kedaragaula have changed the way I understand the aesthetics of these ragas. His renditions of *Tulasibilva*, and the charanam line, *Uramuna mukhamuna, Siramuna bhujamuna*, describing the beauty of the Lord, were emotional. I once learnt a pallavi from a recording of Nedunuri garu’s—*Tamarasadalaneetru, Tyagarajunimitru*, in Bhairavi. This enhanced my understanding of pallavi singing. His pallavi singing was without frills, but filled with intricate sophistication. This taught me that art is not necessarily

flamboyant or ostentatious, but something that appears to be simple, until we scratch the surface and go deeper to discover hidden beauty.

His understanding of core classical ragas was deep. In a commercial recording, he unraveled Dhanyasi, and explained how the nishada is there without quite being there, and a recording of *Ni chittamu* was fascinating. His explorations of less-heard ragas such as Kalanidhi followed by *Chinnanadena* with a crisp kalpanaswaram were cerebral.

Everything Nedunuri garu sang was classical, and chaste. Like my



Guru, he also established a marriage of “seeming” contrasts – purity with excitement, felicity with quiet thoughtfulness, and rare and the new. We will always be indebted to his trendsetting work in popularising the works of many composers including Annamacharya and Bhadrachala Ramadas.

Nedunuri Krishnamurthy was a vidwan in the truest sense of the word – a brilliant musician, artist, performer, teacher and thinker. He will live on in our lives through the purity and power of his music.

PRIYANKA C. PRAKASH
(A young Carnatic vocalist and disciple of Sangita Kala Acharya Neela Ramgopal)