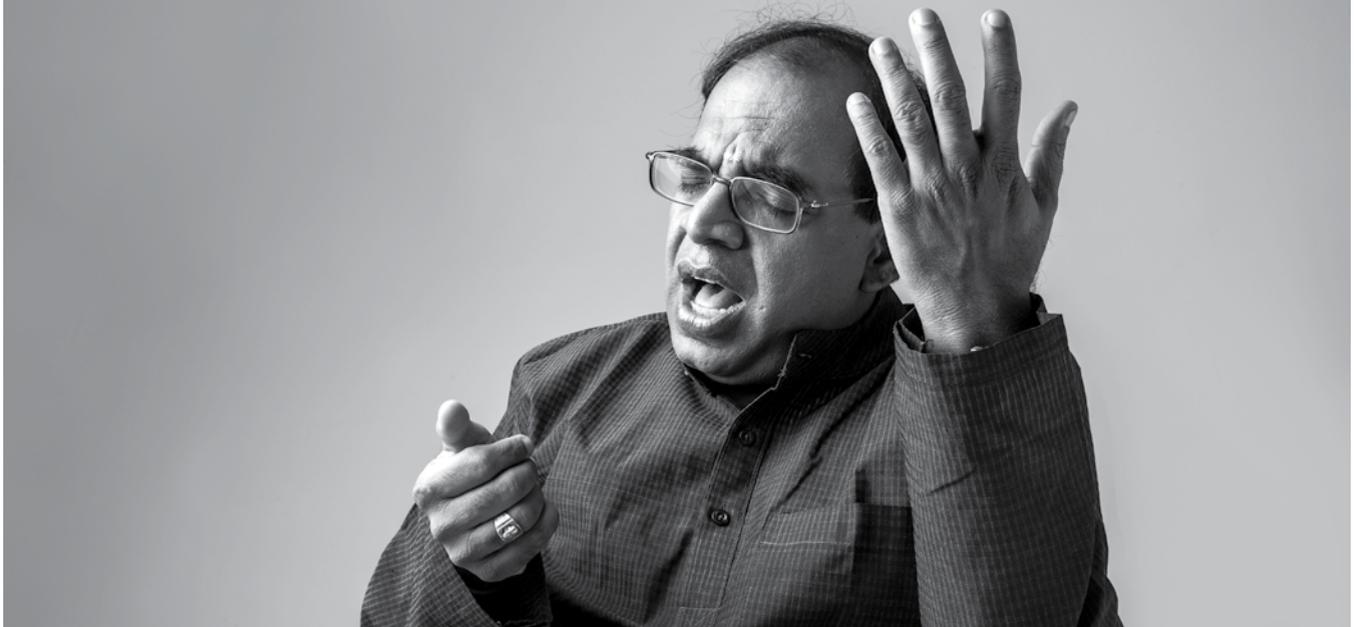


SRIRAM PARASURAM

A devotee at the altar of music

V. Ramnarayan



BHARGAVII MANI

There was a spring in his step, and, though dressed in a kurta and veshti, he verily sprinted towards us. This was musician Sriram Parasuram, and waiting for him near their car was his wife and fellow musician Anuradha. They were late for an appointment and Sriram was looking smugly virtuous, having proved his eagerness to make amends. To me, his athleticism was impressive, and proof that it hadn't been an empty boast when he had told me just a while earlier that he played in cricket matches among management institutes. I always knew that this versatile musician-scholar had a keen interest in sport, but it had been a revelation to me that he actually participated in it.

Sriram Parasuram who turns 53 later this month, is an accomplished artist in at least two distinct genres of music, composer, teacher and expert communicator. He is in fact all that and more. The word polymath suits few people better. I have been an admirer of his music for well over two decades during which period I have listened to his Carnatic violin, Carnatic vocal, Hindustani violin and vocal, north-south jugalbandi with artists of both streams of Indian classical music and folk musicians,

with his wife Anuradha Sriram and even himself (!), his rendering of abhangs and bhajans, his lecture demonstrations on all these varied forms of music, his workshops for students of music, his TV programmes on the universality of music, and his analysis and expositions of the art of great musicians and composers. Incredibly, he manages to leave you thirsting for more, at the end of his demonstrations.

Like such famous south Indians as A. Kanan and N. Rajam (Hindustani classical), Hariharan and Shankar Mahadevan (Hindi film and popular music), and a few others, Sriram Parasuram has mastered an idiom outside his own natural legacy. Learning Hindustani vocal music from the late C.R. Vyas, he has reached the level of accomplishment of a 'native' practitioner. Sriram is of concert level proficiency in both Indian systems.

He has collaborated with musicians from different cultures. Javanese Gamelan, West African drumming, and Japanese Koto are some examples of exotica he has played or sung along with. Born in a musically gifted



Sriram (centre) and sister Meenakshi playing the violin with brother Viswanath (mridangam) in the presence of Lalgudi Jayaraman and Vellore Ramabhadran (1974)



Receiving the first prize from Vyjayanthimala at Shanmukhananda Fine Arts, Bombay



The siblings in concert. Viswanath (mridangam), Narayan (ghatam), Sriram and Meenakshi (violin) with mother and guru Parvathy (tambura)

Parvathy singing at the Tyagaraja Aradhana with her children, husband Parasuram and Krishnamurthi Bhagavatar



family he partnered his brothers Viswanath and Narayan (*Three Brothers and a Violin*) and composed the music for an award winning Hindi pop album *Savariya*. With Anuradha, he directed the music for the Tamil film *Five Star* and produced a Tamil pop album *Chennai Girl*.

It was back in the 1980s that I first heard Sriram Parasuram the violinist, in concerts at Chennai, mainly in the role of an accompanist, and occasionally as a soloist. I loved the sound of his violin and the beauty of his raga delineation. I was convinced then that he would grow into a great solo and accompanying Carnatic violinist, fit to rank with giants like Lalgudi G. Jayaraman, M.S. Gopalakrishnan and T.N. Krishnan.

But perhaps because Sriram Parasuram went away to the US in 1987 to pursue higher studies, he missed opportunities to cash in on the instrumental music boom of that period. When he returned to India in the 1990s, the scenario had changed—the domination of the concert scene by vocal music had forced instrumentalists to reinvent themselves to make a mark in the circuit. So it was that Sriram Parasuram started paying attention to giving vocal music kutcheris, and taking part in jugalbandi concerts.

Today, he may be ranked with the top violinists, with a sound as sweet as the best the instrument can offer, but rarely performs as an accompanist, and solo concerts by him are rarer still. His accomplishments in music are wider than most musicians can only dream of, even if they have the breadth of vision to look beyond their own area of specialisation. He is probably the most sought after teacher and lecturer among both practising musicians and musicologists, with not a week passing by without his sharing his knowledge and love of music with rapt listeners ranging from young rasikas to established artists and gurus.

At the peak of his concert career as an accompanist, Sriram nourished the music of many leading vocalists and instrumentalists. His beloved guru, flautist Tanjavur Viswanathan, this year's Sangita Kalanidhi elect Chitravina Ravikiran, and past masters R.K. Srikantan and Nedunuri Krishnamurti were some of the beneficiaries of his empathetic 'sidemanship', to use a phrase N. Pattabhi Raman, the late founder of *Sruti* liked.