

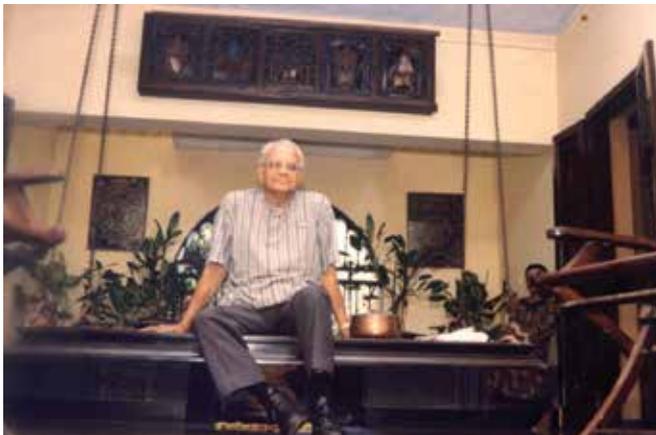
Sruti at 35

S. Janaki

Chennai, 16 October 1983. Mangala isai by nagaswara vidwan P.K. Madurai resonated in the foyer of the Kasturi Srinivasan mini hall of the Music Academy. A lovely floral display spelt the name of the magazine (see photo) which was soon to be launched that morning on Vijayadasami—an auspicious day. It was a double celebration to mark the release of the inaugural issue of SRUTI and the golden jubilee of Sangita Kalanidhi D.K. Pattammal's concert career. The hall was packed, the audience overflowing in fact into the lobby, the foyer downstairs and even outside. It was attended and addressed by several notable figures from the world of music, dance and culture like Rukmini Devi Arundale, T.S. Parthasarathy, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and T.T. Vasu. The launch of an English monthly solely devoted to Indian classical music and dance had raised eyebrows as well as expectations. At *Sruti's* request, doyen Semmangudi presented “first copies” to some 20 men and women representing rasikas, musicians, dancers, scholars, teachers, students, the media and the trade. But before that he bought a copy of *Sruti* as a gesture of support. The function sparkled brighter with little Mandolin Srinivas playing sampradaya music on his foreign instrument. Excellence, tradition and innovation were all highlighted throughout the function, signalling *Sruti's* goals.

Sruti was the brainchild of N. Pattabhi Raman, and the brochure heralding its arrival, distributed by the founder-editor himself at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, had caused quite a stir and raised expectations. To quote Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, musician, organiser, and bilingual arts writer who wrote about the ‘*Sa Ga*’ of *Sruti* on its 20th anniversary, “‘Brilliant!’ was the unanimous verdict

Pattabhi Raman at Alapana



D.K. Pattammal, Iswaran and *Sruti's* first publisher P.N. Sundaresan

of the layman and the cognoscenti. It was one of those “unputdownable” magazines. You simply had to read it from cover to cover. Articles, photographs, newsy items, naughty quips, it had everything. Suddenly, art was fun. It was no more the sombre, sublime stuff on a pedestal. The layout, the language, choice of matter—the editor's hand was apparent on every page and paragraph.” Pattabhi Raman's artistically laid out residence ‘Alapana’ was where *Sruti* was born and grew to adulthood till it moved into the premises of the Sanmar Group in 2006.

Fired by his vision and passion that blazed for decades, Pattabhi Raman's commitment to his work was remarkable and he was able to generate and sustain this commitment over the years in his colleagues at *Sruti* who made up what was called the ‘*Sruti* parivaar’. Every issue was, and has always been under his able successors K.V. Ramanathan (from 2003 to 2007) and V. Ramnarayan, the product of hard work—every page is scrutinised with an eye for aesthetics. The attempt is to sculpt every issue into a treasure that art lovers would want to preserve.

It is interesting how the scope of *Sruti* has expanded over the decades. A close look at the changes carried out in its masthead on the front cover reveal the magazine's growth and impact over the years. *Sruti* was launched as a “South Indian classical music and dance magazine”. The focus initially was more on the South Indian performing arts, although all the classical dance forms did find a place. Hindustani music was soon brought into its ambit and *Sruti* was described as “Indian classical music and dance magazine”. Pattabhi Raman believed in the broad fivefold classification of the performing arts into primitive, folk, devotional, art and popular. So from October 1991, the masthead became shorter to indicate this broader outlook

and the magazine came to be known as “Indian music and dance magazine”. Ten years after its inception Pattabhi Raman, with the backing of formidable resource persons like T. Sankaran, S. Rajam, B.M. Sundaram, Sulochana Pattabhiraman, N. Ramanathan and others, had made *Sruti* a name to reckon with in the arts world. To reflect this development the masthead too was changed to “India’s premier music and dance magazine”. After his death in December 2002, *Sruti* was kept alive by its employees and trustees—quite a rare feat—and soon marched ahead under the leadership of K.V. Ramanathan as Editor-in-Chief. In December 2006, soon after Sanmar took *Sruti* under its wing, and with V. Ramnarayan’s homecoming to *Sruti* and his assuming the mantle of Editor-in-Chief in 2007, the magazine added a new dimension—theatre. The masthead too reflects this change and it now proudly proclaims *Sruti* to be “India’s premier magazine for the performing arts”. All this is matter for satisfaction as *Sruti* complete 35 years in the field of arts journalism.

Over the years *Sruti* has played an influential role in promoting excellence, preserving traditions of value, and encouraging

innovation. It has featured in-depth profiles of artists and artistic communities, and authoritative analyses of their achievements and contributions. It has been presenting insightful reports on events and developments relating to Indian music and dance from all over India and the world. It has made a name by offering guidance and enlightenment through music appreciation notes, opinion columns, constructive debates, humorous articles and cartoons. It has not lagged behind in exposing wrong-doings through investigative reports even while highlighting positive acts and achievements. Now and then, the magazine also offers a glimpse of the arts of other countries and cultures.

In the last 35 years, *Sruti* has published features on more than 500 musicians, dancers, composers, gurus, institutions, and covered more than a hundred different topics. *Bala On Bharatanatyam*, *Semmagudi—A Mosaic Portrait*, *Thakur Jaideva Singh—A Great Savant*, and *Song of Surrender* (A centenary tribute to M.S. Subbulakshmi) are the four books published by The Sruti Foundation.

Special projects were launched from time to time under the auspices of the Sruti Foundation to analyse and document various aspects of music and dance.

At a time when the ragam-tanam-pallavi was on the wane in kutcheris, the Pallavi Project was launched on a Tamil New Year’s day on 13 April 1984 in association with the Madras Music Academy and the TTK Trust—both then headed by T.T. Vasu. Rendering a ragam-tanam-pallavi was compulsory in the RTP concert series which was held in two phases. Pallavi concerts presented by experts like K.V. Narayanaswamy, M.L. Vasanthakumari, R. Vedavalli, B.V. Raman & B.V. Lakshmanan, Chengleput Ranganathan, R.K. Srikantan, T.R. Subramanyam, Suguna Purushothaman, and R.K. Srikantan helped to revive interest in the ragam-tanam-pallavi among performers and rasikas alike. Gradually other sabhas fell in line, resulting in the revival of the ragam-tanam-pallavi in Carnatic music concerts.

The National Seminar on Bharatanatyam Dance Traditions in December 1989 was a landmark event of documentation and analysis of the banis of several traditional natyacharyas, including doyens like Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai, Tanjavur K.P. Kittappa Pillai, Gurus of Sri Rajarajeswari Bharatanatyam Kala Mandir in Mumbai, Vaitheeswarankoil Muthuswamy Pillai, and K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai.



Clippings from the past: Sruti’s 10th anniversary...

...15th anniversary



Other memorable projects include:

- ❖ Day-long analysis of the music of violin maestro Lalgudi G. Jayaraman
- ❖ Analysis of the music of Carnatic vocal maestro G.N. Balasubramaniam
- ❖ Bridging the North-South Divide through discussions on Carnatic and Hindustani music



Semmangudi clicking off the Sruti Website in 1998. Others in picture: Pattabhi Raman, Madurai N. Krishnan and Ranjani of Webindia



(L to R): N. Pattabhi Raman, S. Rajam, Sulochana Pattabhiraman, Ritha Rajan, Calcutta K.S. Krishnamurti and N. Ramanathan at the two-day seminar on G.N. Balasubramaniam



- ❖ Seminar on E. Krishna Iyer's role in the Renaissance of Bharatanatyam
- ❖ Seminar on Taval and taval vidwans

DVDs of the seminar proceedings on Bharatanatyam, Lalgudi and GNB are made available for educational purposes.

In order to recognise the contribution of personalities and organisations in the field of the performing arts, the Sruti Foundation instituted the E. Krishna Iyer Medal in 1989. This is awarded to an individual or an institution who has made a significant contribution to the preservation and promotion of Bharatanatyam traditions. The list of veteran recipients reads like a veritable who's who of Bharatanatyam of yesteryear. The Vellore Gopalachariar award is presented to a senior musician. Three scholarships, based on endowments, are also given to deserving students of music and dance.

Sruti has built up a sound reputation for integrity, objectivity and accuracy. Organisations have come forward to collaborate in presenting events with the Sruti Foundation—events like the Lec Dem Mela with the Music Forum, and the Nritya Samrachana with Apsaras arts, Singapore are a big draw.

The photos of performing artists in *Sruti's* Samudri archives are much in demand by other publications and cultural organisations across the globe. *Sruti* celebrated its tenth, fifteenth, and 30th anniversaries with programmes in its inimitable style combining tradition and innovation. The silver jubilee too was “a special splash” celebrated at Alapana, The Park and a traditional sabha venue where several old associates (some of whom are no more) were honoured. The most recent landmark was the release of the 400th issue of *Sruti* in January 2018. *Sruti's* popularity and reach have been increasing, but not as much as its mentors would like it to grow. We are thankful to several dancers and musicians who have been long-time subscribers and supporters of *Sruti*, but the general trend is to buy only copies

of the magazine in which they are featured and circulate it on social media! Well, *Sruti* is a niche magazine!

Sruti has not stagnated nor has it become complacent. In keeping with the times, *Sruti* has transformed from b/w to colour, and has also made its presence felt in the digital world. The *Sruti* website launched in 1998 by Semmangudi has been revamped more than once and the website www.sruti.com now boasts of



A session by Dr. S. Sunder at the Lec Dem Mela (2017)

an attractive look. The *Sruti* App was launched with much song and dance in March 2014, and can be downloaded easily on iOS and Android platforms. *Sruti* Magz is its identity on Facebook, and daily posts keep the srutimag.blogspot.in alive and ticking. More than 15 e-books, based on features published in *Sruti* over three decades, are available for sale on the website.

Sruti has crossed many milestones, faced ups and downs in its eventful journey, but has continued to march ahead unfazed. Under the chairmanship of N. Sankar, dynamic involvement of trustee Sukanya Sankar, with a dedicated team headed by V. Ramnarayan, and comfortably housed in a professional setup, *Sruti* it is hoped will be a leader in arts journalism for a long time to come.

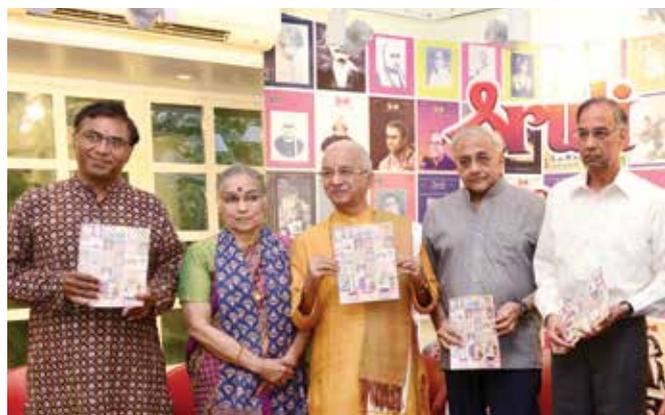


Nitya Samrachana Lec Dems by R. Vedavalli with her disciples...



...and Vyjayantimala Bali (July 2017)

N. Ravikiran, Shanta and V.P. Dhananjayan, N. Sankar and R. Seshasayee during the launch of the 400th issue of *Sruti* in January 2018



The core team (2018) S. Janaki, Sudha Narayanan, Sumathi Viswanathan, Kalpana Muralikrishnan, Sukanya Sankar, V. Ramnarayan, S. Sathish and G. Suresh

