

A great lakshana vidwan

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Mysore Vasudevachar, who was a guru-bandhu of Poochi Iyengar, has written in detail about him in his book. Salem Chellam Iyengar, son of Salem Doraiswami Iyengar, who was a disciple of Poochi Iyengar, has also written in detail about him. These are two sources from which we can gather a lot of information about Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar.

Poochi Iyengar was a man of great character, and his musical prowess was exceptional. His music was melodious, traditional and beautiful. Mysore Vasudevachar, having known him well, writes about Poochi Iyengar and his interactions with him. He was as good looking as his music was. He remarks that Poochi Iyengar was not very short, not very thin, was of wheatish complexion, and was very careful with his belongings.

Given that back in the day, artists would not wear shirts in temple concerts; when we look at Srinivasa Iyengar's photo, we can infer that his style and his clothes were very elegant and distinguished. With all that he had learnt from his guru, his sharp intellect and consistent practice made his music beautiful, enjoyable, and was greatly appreciated by vidwans and rasikas alike.

Salem Chellam Iyengar writes interestingly about how Srinivasa Iyengar came under the tutelage of his guru, Patnam Subramania Iyer. While Poochi Iyengar was studying in the fourth grade, the Ramanathapuram Raja, Sriman Bhaskara Setupati, had visited his school. Not knowing that the guru was there, a teary-eyed Poochi, immersed in bhakti, was singing Tirumangai Azhwar's pasuram *Vadinen vadi*. Listening to the bhakti laden verses, sung by the little lad, King Bhaskara Setupati stood silently



behind him extremely moved by the rendition. Poochi Iyengar, was shocked to see the king standing behind him. The raja, pleased with Poochi's interest in music, invited him to the royal court and then enrolled him in the gurukulam of Patnam Subramania Iyer to learn music.

Mysore Vasudevachar narrates the same episode in a simpler manner. He writes that King Bhaskara Setupati, impressed with Poochi Iyengar's musical talents, took him to Patnam Subramania Iyer, gifted the guru a sum of thousand rupees and requested that he take Poochi Iyengar as his disciple. The guru, knowing that the disciple was destined to become a great vidwan, accepted him as a student.

Salem Chellam Iyengar writes that in the presence of Raja Bhaskara Setupati, guru Patnam Subramania Iyer and many other distinguished dignitaries, at the Raja's darbar, Poochi Iyengar sang his first concert where the famous trio of Tirukkodikaval

Krishna Iyer (violin), Azhaganambiya Pillai (mridangam), and Manpoondiya Pillai (khanjira) accompanied him. The kutcheri was a great success. The king was elated and honoured him with a sum of ten thousand and one rupees, performed kanakabhishekam, and also made him the asthana vidwan of his court.

From then on, until the very end, Poochi performed innumerable concerts. For his knowledge of the intricate sangeeta sastra and his adherence to sangeeta lakshana, Poochi Iyengar was celebrated as a great lakshana vidwan by vidwans of his time.

Poochi Iyengar has composed many varnams. For many of his kritis, he composed the chittaswaras himself. Several kritis have korvais for the chittaswaram, which are exquisite. For example, the Kedaragaula kriti, *Saraguna palimpa*, has an interesting chittaswara pattern. It is said that in those days, a korvai that is structured in threes was not in vogue; it would be in fours or twos. Also, in those days, one does not find the practice of singing swaras and constructing a korvai for all the kritis.

In this kriti, *Saraguna palimpa*, the end of the chittaswaram has a pair of similarly constructed patterns, which is the same as in the beginning of the kriti—resulting in a korvai of twos in the swaram and one from the sahiyam—thus making it a korvai of threes. The pattern of chittaswaram and the beginning of the pallavi is described below.

RS; NDP | DP; MGR | Sa(1)Ra(2)
Gu(1)Na(1)a(1)

In 1919, as Poochi Srinivasa Iyengar was meditating on Tirumalai Srinivasa, he attained the lotus feet of the Lord. ■

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