

Music of M.K. Tyagaraja Bhagavatar in films N. Ramanathan

It is over six decades since M.K. Tyagaraja Bhagavatar passed away on 1 November 1959. This article is a study of the music of M.K. Tyagaraja Bhagavatar in films, that has been appended in a Compact Disc, to the book titled *MKT Bhagavatar - Isaiyum Vaazkkaiyum* by D.V. Balakrishnan [published by Old Madras Press, Chennai 600028. Ph: (044) 24621139. December 2018. Rs. 499.] The CD contains 120 rare songs.

In 2010, Suresh Balakrishnan, son of the author of the book under review, had written a book, *Bagavather - His Life and Times*, in English. It was reviewed in *Sruti* 310 (July 2010). D.V. Balakrishnan's book is not just a Tamil version but has several valuable additional features. Before the first chapter, the author has thoughtfully placed a tribute to Tyagaraja Bhagavatar (MKT)—a 'super-star' in an era when the term had not



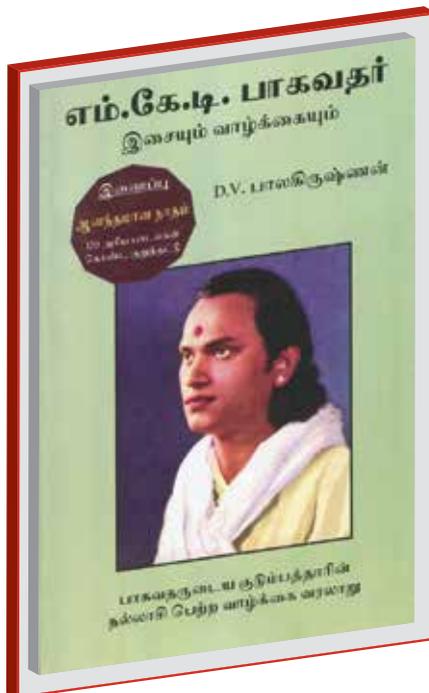
been coined—written by star-actor turned politician M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), whose image continues to influence Tamil Nadu politics to this day. In his essay written with utmost modesty, MGR beautifully captures the 'magnetic personality' of MKT.

The first chapter details MKT's early years starting with his birth in a family of goldsmiths. Although he was initiated into the family's ancestral profession of goldsmithery, his heart was in music from a very young age, as perhaps it was destined that music should be the 'golden' career for him. After undergoing serious training in music from Ponnusami Ayyangar, he entered the field of drama as a boy artist and later rose to become a star in the drama field. He continued further training in music with Alathur Venkatesa Iyer.

MKT's film career—starting from *Pavalakkodi* (1934) till *Haridas* (1944) gets a detailed treatment in the next chapter, which also presents him as a busy concert singer and his association with the Tamil Isai Movement. MKT was an able kutcheri

artist, and although he hailed from the Alathur school, he received a kind of biased patronage. However, his music recitals were a great success among the masses. He was also very generous in donating money for good causes and for the needy.

MKT's dazzling career got suddenly curtailed as he, along with others, mainly the film actor N.S. Krishnan, was implicated for the alleged murder of a journalist, Lakshmikanthan. Convicted at the end of a sensational trial, he spent a depressing period of 27 months in prison, which he usefully spent learning a number of languages. Found innocent of the crime when the matter was reheard on appeal, he and Krishnan were acquitted in 1947. After the release, his kutcheri and movie assignments resumed, and he even started staging dramas after a long gap, although his earlier verve was missing.



A display for *Haridas*

