

Guru puja of Palani Subramania Pillai

The 59th annual guru puja of the legendary mridangam maestro, Palani Subramania Pillai was conducted virtually by the Palani Sri M. Subramania Pillai Trust. The programme premiered on 2 June 2021 on the Trust's YouTube page. A number of Carnatic vocalists voluntarily sang as a tribute to this great master. Most of the artists sang only to the accompaniment of the tambura.

After a short introductory speech by mridanga vidwan K. Arun Prakash (one of the trustees), the event continued with a clip of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer (accompanied by T.N. Krishnan on the violin, and Palani Subramania Pillai on the mridangam) rendering *Marivere*, a composition of Syama Sastry in Anandabhairavi raga.



Palani Subramania Pillai

The first performance of the evening was by Carnatic vocalist Sikkil Gurucharan. Beginning his performance with the first verse

Nirvana satakam composed by Adi Sankara, he continued with *Sri nathadi guruguho*, a composition of Muthuswami Dikshitar in Mayamalavagaula. The highlight of the performance was the artist's impressive voice and extended breath control.

N.S. Kamakshi was the next to present her piece—Muthuswami Dikshitar's *Manasa guruguha* in the raga Anandabhairavi. While listening to the artist's rendition, Sangita Kalanidhi S. Ramanathan's version of the same song came to mind. The artist's clear voice executed brigas with no visible strain.

Srirangam V. Venkatanagarajan's rendition of Muthuswami Dikshitar's *Sri Ramachandro* (Sreeranjani) brought out the piety of the lyrics. His voice, adept in singing fast phrases, was just as skilled in singing phrases in the lower octave too.

K. Bharat Sundar's *Brochevarevarura* (Khamas), was like a breath of fresh air. His version of the song was very different from the trademark M.S. Subbulakshmi's version. Changing from chatusram to tisram in the chittaswaram, the artist displayed his control over laya.

"Who made the history and the great epics? How did Satyabhama get the idea of giving her own husband as a gift?" Tyagaraja asks in his song *Naradaguruswami* in the raga Darbar. G. Ravikiran sang this composition with admirable voice modulation and veneration. This piece, often sung in the past, is almost never heard in concerts nowadays.

Subbaraya Sastry's Hameerkalyani masterpiece, *Venkatasaila vihara* was sung by Vignesh Ishwar. Popularised



by vidushis T. Brinda and T. Muktha, this song is on the deity of Tirumala. Though the artist's version was much different from the above mentioned duo's, the quaintness and beauty of the song remained the same.

Brinda Manickavasagam sang *Marakata Valli*, Muthuswami Dikshitar's composition in Kambhoji. Intricate sangatis were sung comfortably, and those in the higher octave were rendered with delectable ease.

S. Adithyanarayanan presented *Sri Guruguhasya dasoham* in raga Poorvi. Taking the artist's age into consideration, this composition of Muthuswami Dikshitar in the sixth vibhakti (shashti vibhakti), was sung with great depth.

Amritha Murali's version of *Vadanyeswaram* brought out the beauty of Devagandhari without phrases of Arabhi or Sama straying in. Her perfect pronunciation did not fail to impress.

Muthuswami Dikshitar's *Sri Guruguha moortey* in raga Udayaravichandrika was sung by Sumithra Vasudev. This audava raga was sung effortlessly, and the artist's voice modulated at the right places, with no touch of artificiality.

Aishwarya Vidhya Raghunath sang Syama Sastry's *Brovavamma* (Manji)

dexterously. This slow, melancholic piece was sung beautifully, and the few fast phrases were sung with admirable ease. The artist's rendition reminded the listener of vidushi T. Brinda's version of the song, emotive and full of bhava.

Muthuswami Dikshitar's classic piece—*Sri Subramanyo* in Todi was sung by Ramakrishnan Murthy. The piece began with the sadharana gandhara – it was sung plain—a rarely sung prayoga of the swara. One could notice a few swaraksharas, and the song was rendered without compromising the integrity of the raga.

“Know unerringly the grandeur with which the supreme Lord is effulgent,” says Tyagaraja in his kriti, *Paramatmudu velige*. This kriti in the raga Vagadeeswari was sung by Rithvik Raja at a slow pace, his voice emotively bringing out the meaning of the lyrics excellently.

Palghat Ramprasad sang *Sri Rama jaya Rama*, Tyagaraja's magnificent kriti in Yadukulakambhoji. Before he began, the artist narrated an anecdote involving this song and Pillai Subramania Pillai as told by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer to him and his father. The lilting melody of Yadukulakambhoji made the rasika feel peaceful at once.



Trichy Sankaran

Sangita Kalanidhi Trichy Sankaran ended the session with a tani avartanam in Misra Chapu. He shifted from one nadai to the next effortlessly. The rhythm was slowly coaxed out of the mridangam by the maestro's gentle playing. The nadam of his mridangam was wonderful, and the sound of the cymbals in the background elevated the artist's avartanam.

The event concluded with the vote of thanks by senior mridanga vidwan and trustee, Mannarkoil J. Balaji. He thanked all the artists who had performed, the younger members of the trust, as well as Trichy Sankaran and K. Arun Prakash for their contributions.

VIBHA KRISHNAKUMAR
(A young student at Vidya Mandir, Mylapore, and also a disciple of vidushi Geetha Raja)



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