

Sangita Kala Acharya B. Krishnamoorthy

It was a Vijayadasami day in 1983. My Sanskrit Professor C.S. Sundaram took me to the home of vidwan B. Krishnamoorthy—fondly addressed as BK Sir—(hereafter BK) as he wished me to learn Dikshitar kritis from BK. I am grateful to Professor Sundaram, who was my well-wisher and supportive of my music career.

I was studying B.A. Music at the University of Madras, and had never met BK Sir prior to this meeting. My emotions were varied—combining anxiety and excitement as my musical background was limited. However, I could reproduce complex phrases or sangatis in Carnatic and film music. Professor Sundaram and I entered BK Sir’s home. He invited us into the hall, and asked me about my sruti which was “rendu kattai” (D sruti). He was hesitant to raise his C sruti tambura to D, so he told me to sing a song in C pitch. I sang *Saketa nagaranatha* in Harikambhoji, which I had learnt from vidushi K.R. Lakshmi, a splendid vocalist and a faculty member at the music department, University of Madras. I gauged from his expression that he was happy with my rendition. He accepted me as a student and said he would teach me in C sruti, but he advised me to practice in D pitch. After teaching me a couple of slokas on Ganesa and Saraswati, he taught me Dikshitar’s evergreen kriti, *Sri Saraswati* in Arabhi. I felt blessed to listen to exquisite music from a refined musician, and I cherished every moment in his class.

BK Sir was a kind and warm person, but I would restrain myself from

having a conversation during or after lessons due to mere respect, and I maintained that throughout my learning years. Besides singing, I would listen and only answer his questions. However, Sir shared a lot of information about his musical training from his gurus, mentors, and childhood musical activities when he lived in Padarakudi.



As a tribute to my guru, I wish to elucidate his early life as a student, person, performer, scholar, and an exceptional teacher.

Born on 24 August 1932, B. Krishnamoorthy grew up in Padarakudi near Karaikudi. As a boy, he was fascinated by the drama music of S.V. Subbaiah Bhagavatar while memorising an entire collection of bhajana

sampradaya paddhati without any formal training. Later, his renditions of bhajana sampradaya were documented as an audio CD, for which the musical preludes were composed by vidwan P.S. Narayanaswamy. He had his initial music training from Rama Iyengar of Karaikudi, a disciple of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. He also studied Sanskrit from Sundara Sastri of Kovilur near Karaikudi.

Consequently, his pedagogical approach in analysing Dikshitar’s kritis in detail frequently straddled many disciplines: Sanskrit prosody, meter, literary devices, layered textual meanings, the language itself, and the use of music. BK Sir’s interest in theatre, dance, and the visual arts made the student aware of all the art forms.

As a teenager, he moved to Chennai to learn music from his elder brother vidwan B. Rajam Iyer whose mentorship he would often praise. He developed his skills further by rendering vocal support to his brother in performances. BK Sir was a great admirer of Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and would mimic his style accurately with a husky voice. Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar often invited BK Sir to accompany him for vocal support, but he was not in favour of leaving his brother Rajam Iyer. Ariyakudi was his all-time favourite, and his voice would choke whenever he sang *Cheppajala* in *Inta saukhyamanine*, a beautiful kriti of Tyagaraja in Kapi raga. BK Sir marvelled at Ariyakudi’s lyrical and musical delivery of that particular word. Ariyakudi played a significant role in BK Sir’s musical career. BK imbibed the Ariyakudi bani by combining the lyrics and raga bhava with a soft and bold voice to melt any heart.