

Sundara Amutha Ganam

Carnatic music composers from the pre-trinity period to the current times have very often made their literary outpourings out of their devotion to God and passion towards music. Among the women composers, Andal, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, contemporary composers like D. Pattammal, Ambujam Krishna, Kalyani Varadarajan, Suguna Purushothaman and a few others have made significant contributions to the wealth of Carnatic music. But it is a bitter truth that their compositions have not received due patronage from contemporary musicians and sangeeta rasikas. Only a few compositions have made it successfully to the concert platform and caught the attention of rasikas.

Sundaravalli Ammal was a simple homemaker who was not formally trained in music or literature. Because of divine blessings, she composed songs on the deities she visited and wrote them in a notebook. Sundaravalli was born in 1906 in Kuzhumani village in Tiruchirappalli district. After her marriage to school teacher K. Rajam Iyengar, at the age of fourteen, the couple lived in many places like Srivilliputtur, Vellore, Srirangam, Nellore, Madurai and Coimbatore. Besides her household chores and managing her family of six children, she found time and inspiration to pen her outpourings which came to her spontaneously only because of her divinity and simplicity. She breathed her last in 1980. Her grandchildren later located her notebook of songs and decided to publish and popularise them.

The songs in Tamil, marked by simplicity, extol the glory of various gods. In a few songs, Sundaravalli Ammal has indicated the name of the

raga, but most of them do not contain any indication of specific raga or tala. The compositions of Sundaravalli Ammal need to be publicised and propagated.

The family members of the late composer published the book titled *Kaanaadha Kovilkal - Kelaadha Geethankal* in 1991, containing some of her compositions. As a sequel to that, another ten songs have been tuned and notated by mridanga vidwan Arun Prakash in the most appealing ragas. The family released this book *Sundara Amutha Ganam* on 29 August 2021, handing over the first copy to celebrated musician P. Unnikrishnan. The book contains the sahitya in Tamil and English, with notations in English so that musicians anywhere can learn these compositions and present them in concerts. After the book release, the songs were presented to a live audience by a team of musicians led by Arun Prakash. The seasoned mridanga vidwan is the son of the illustrious music composer L. Krishnan. On his part, Arun Prakash has selected ragas well to match the mood of the songs, choosing rakti ragas like Mayamalavagaula, Anandabhairavi, Dhanyasi, Kambhoji, Kanada, Khamas, Poorvikalyani, Sama, and also shown variety in the kalapramanam within the same tala. His innate talent to use the most appropriate phrases to reveal the beautiful picture of the raga is evident in the tuning of the kritis.

The songs were rendered by singers Vignesh Easwar and Aditya Madhavan. The vocalists exhibited admirable coordination in rendering sangatis and projecting the raga bhava with clear enunciation of the sahitya. The duo needs a special



Sundaravalli Ammal

mention for internalising the songs and singing without any reference.

The instrumental ensemble too enhanced the beauty of the songs, never coming in the way of the enjoyment of the bhakti-laden sahitya. The musical interludes have been intelligently interspersed between the pallavi-anupallavi or the anupallavi-charanam. The well coordinated orchestra consisted of K. Arun Prakash (mridangam), Guruprasad (ghatam), Mylai Karthikeyan (nagaswaram), Sandeep Ramachandran, Sayi Rakshit and Madan Mohan (violin), Sujit Naik (flute), and Charumati Chandrasekar (veena). Arun Prakash deserves wholehearted appreciation for tuning the song *Bhaktargalai kaathidum Kodhainayagi* on Ranganayaki Tayar of Srirangam as a ragamalika comprising Khamas, Nalinakanti and Saranga ragas set to a lilting tisra nadai.

The musicians presented the songs with admirable harmony, highlighting the subtle nuances without a harsh or out-of-sync note during the entire presentation. Arun Prakash and his team deserve praise for their flawless execution and extensive preparations during the difficult Covid period.

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