

Anayampatti S. Ganesan turns 90

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The jalatarangam, today, is secure in the hands of vidwan Anayampatti S. Ganesan. Born on 22 May 1932, the maestro turns 90 this month. His only regret is about four of the vintage cups having broken over the years!

The cups are made of original Chinese porcelain, a ceramic material largely comprising kaolin, says Ganesan. The mineral gains its characteristic strength as a result of emergence from kilns with temperatures no less than 1,400 degrees Celsius. The manufacturing technology is a millennium old, before which metal cups catered to jalatarangam music. The instrument finds reference in ancient times as 'udaka-vadyam' that enables playing music on water, which is listed under the 64 traditional skills called 'chatushashti kalas'. [See *Sruti* 10 for a detailed article on the history of the jalatarangam.]

In the mid-19th century, when Ganesan's father, Anayampatti Subbayar (hailed as a legend of



jalatarangam) inherited Krishna Iyer's treasured property, Carnatic music did not have many jalatarangam maestros. "Their presence was primarily confined to areas in Chettinad and Madurai belts," says Ganesan. The picture today too is not rosy, but there is no scope for disillusionment either.

Subbayar, regarded among Carnatic's first artist to play only the

jalatarangam, had another son, Dhandapani (originally a violinist), who took up jalatarangam and established himself in the field. Anayampatti S. Dhandapani's proficiency soon made him synonymous with the polyphonic jalatarangam. His violin accompanist was his brother Ganesan who had learnt to play the violin from his paternal uncle Narayana Iyer since the age of eight and subsequently from Dhandapani himself.

Dhandapani's career bloomed, but he died in 1982 at the age of 55. His father Subbayar had also passed away well before that and Ganesan sensed his potential role as a jalatarangam player to enliven the family legacy in the rare instrument, and he chose to step in with fresh vigour.

Not that he was new to handling it; Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavatar had persuaded him to take up the instrument and had effectively mentored him in understanding the nuances of the jalatarangam that could particularly brighten certain ragas and compositions. That guidance helped Ganesan broaden and deepen his imagination and skillset.

Today, the audio recordings of Dhandapani serve as testimony to Ganesan having imbibed the Anayampatti style. Ganesan's rendition of Hamsadhwani (*Vatapi Ganapatim*) and the flurry of sonorous taps that work as fillers between the words in *Tunbam nergayil*, trace their freshness to Dhandapani. Incidentally, Dhandapani's rendition in Desh raga of the poem by his contemporary Bharathidasan, even today strikes a chord in a café upcountry.

Anayampatti Ganesan in concert (2015)

