

Athishaya Vara Prasadini

It was a usual Sunday evening on 12 June 2022, and the road to the venue, Ragasudha Hall near Nageswara Rao Park, Mylapore was filled with cars. The hall was packed with art patrons, musicians, rasikas and music students. The venue had a festive look with several family members and disciples of Maragatham Ramaswamy gathered there awaiting the release of the book, *Athishaya Vara Prasadini*, containing notations of 50 rare compositions, which Maragatham Ramaswamy, learnt from her gurus in Chennai. The event was organised by Ramapriya Arts Foundation.

Vidushi Maragatham Ramaswamy, a respected music teacher who settled in Virginia, U.S.A. is a gold medallist from Central College of Carnatic Music, Chennai, when it was headed by Musiri Subramania Iyer. She learned from many other stalwarts, including Ramnad Krishnan, T.M. Thyagarajan, K.V. Narayanaswamy and B. Rajam Iyer. She had her training in violin from Trivandrum Harihara Iyer, M.S. Anantharaman, T.N. Krishnan, Varahur Muthuswamy Iyer and Lalgudi Jayaraman. Further, she learnt from Tanjavur S. Kalyanaraman for ten years.

As a guru, she strongly believes that the pathantara of the kritis should be passed on to the next generation of musicians without any dilution. The book *Athishaya Vara Prasadini*, is a step in that direction. She has compiled English notations for 50 rare compositions of twenty-two vaggeyakaras for the benefit of aspiring musicians.



Maragatham Ramaswamy

The event commenced with a prayer song by Lakshmi Prasanna; and Varalakshmi Anandkumar, Trustee, Ramapriya Arts Academy welcomed the gathering. Vidwan T.K. Murthy, T.V. Somanathan, IAS, Finance Secretary, Government of India, Cleveland Sundaram, vidushi R.S.

Jayalakshmi, Sahana Vivekanandan from the Sringeri Jagadguru Mahasannidhanam and vidushi Sikkil Mala Chandrasekhar graced the occasion and also wrote the foreword for the book. T.V. Somanathan, IAS, released the book, and art patron and organiser Cleveland V.V. Sundaram received the first copy.

T.V. Somanathan is Maragatham's nephew (her brother's son). He said in his address, "I have grown with her in the same household. She was a student of two distinct gurus— Tanjavur S. Kalyanaraman and Lalgudi Jayaraman— learning both vocal and violin. Kalyanaraman Sir was temperamental with his biting sarcasm. Yet my aunt learnt so much from him for ten years. She was one of her period's best vocalists and violinists though she remained relatively unknown in this part of the concert arena. It was because she decided to put her family before her career. She was not inclined to go behind sabha secretaries and critics seeking concert opportunities. Then she left for America and blossomed as a teacher of great significance by

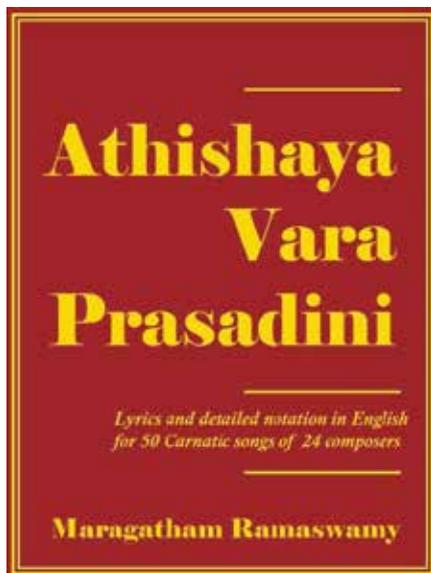
V.V. Sundaram receiving the first copy of the book from T.V. Somanathan.
L to R: Mala Chandrasekhar, Sahana Vivekanandan, R.S. Jayalakshmi and T.K. Murthy



showing infinite patience, care and affection to the students. She wanted to share every bit of her knowledge with her students. She has a battalion of devoted students who will do anything for their teacher.”

Cleveland Sundaram said, “I have personally seen how Maragatham has trained thousands of students in the US taking part in the competitions. All the students who performed well in the competitions used to mention Maragatham Ramaswamy as their teacher. If pure music is sustaining in the US, it is due to the untiring efforts of a couple of teachers, and Maragatham is foremost among them. She has amazing control and grip over layam. She received the best teacher award at the Cleveland Tyagaraja Aradhana, and I have never heard her scolding any student.”

Sahana Vivekanandan from the Sringeri Jagadguru Mahasannidhanam offered benediction. A short video of Maragatham expressing her gratitude to all those vidwans and vidushis who



helped her in this project was played. A formal vote of thanks was given by Durga Venkatesh.

The book release was followed by a beautiful concert by vidwan Sikkil Gurucharan accompanied by V. Sanjeev (violin) and Sai Giridhar (mridangam). It was very thoughtful of Gurucharan to include some rare songs from the book.

The book is the result of the hard work put in for one year by Maragatham and her disciples, and is appropriately titled *Athishaya Vara Prasadini* to denote the hard work of all the disciples and relatives in Chennai which resulted in the release of this book. Also the composition of Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar in the raga Mandari which starts with the words *Athishaya vara prasadini* is included in the book.

The book is of high quality printing in the size of 11” x 8-1/2” printed in white maplitho 80 gsm paper with maroon colour wrapper. The number of pages is 192 and the book is priced at Rs. 750. The book should be useful to music students and up-and-coming musicians who want to internalise the rare compositions. The book is available with Karnatic Music Book Centre, Royapettah, Chennai, and Sruthilaya, Luz, Chennai.

C. RAMAKRISHNAN

Mangalam Shankar’s Geeta Ganamrutam

On 8 July 2022, vidushi Mangalam Shankar released her book, *Geeta Ganamrutam*. The book contains 31 compositions of Maharaja Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar of Mysore with notations in Tamil

by Mangalam Shankar, along with an audio recording of these songs rendered by her with her disciples. The book release function had eminent guests like musician Seetha Narayanan; Gandhi Kannadasan,

proprietor Kannadasan Publications; Diwakar, the publisher of the book; and music composer Mahesh Mahadev. Speaking at the function, Seetha Narayanan emphasised the importance of the ability of aspiring

At the book release (L to R): Diwakar, Seetha Narayanan, Mangalam Shankar, Gandhi Kannadasan and Mahesh Mahadev

Mangalam Shankar



students to read and write Carnatic music notations. She went on to say that Mangalam Shankar's disciplined approach towards musical notations and her traditional style will help students learn and assimilate these kritis easily. Kannadasan spoke about his long association with Mangalam Shankar's guru, T.M. Thyagarajan's family. He also expressed the desire for Mangalam Shankar to compose music for some of his father's poetry. The book's publisher, Diwakar, spoke about this project and expressed his sense of privilege to have been associated with the publication. Composer Mahadev spoke about the unique raga he created, 'Tyagaraja Mangalam', to honour Mangalam Shankar and her guru.

Mangalam Shankar is well known in Carnatic music as a vocalist, composer, musicologist, and guru. She is the recipient of Isai Kalaimani Sangita Vidwan, Sangita Ratna, Isai Thendral, amongst several other awards. She has performed widely on various stages for over four decades, and her music albums and publications are very popular. Mangalam Shankar is the disciple of vidwan T.M. Thyagarajan, whose style she has imbibed and built upon to create a style of her own.

Mangalam Shankar in conversation with Bhavani Ravindran

Choice of topic

One of my students came to me after listening to the song in the raga Bhogavasantam and asked me to teach it to her. While learning it, I was attracted to the song and the composition style. This led me to dig



deeper into this composition's origins and thus the journey began.

Inspiration

I found that the composer, Maharaja Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar of the Mysore dynasty, had written over 90 songs and used rare ragas like Bhogavasantam, Suddhalalita, and Pratapavarali and unique talas like chatusra Dhruva, misra Jhampa, and khanda Tripata. On researching, I also found that these compositions were predominantly used only in Karnataka, whereas in Chennai, only very few kritis of the Maharaja were being sung. This led me to think that by selecting a few pieces of my liking and notating them, it could help in popularising these works so that several musicians can make them a part of their repertoire. I felt that the compositions of the Maharaja deserve greater attention from our Carnatic music community than what has been received so far.

Attractive qualities

All the compositions are in Sanskrit, which makes for beautiful lyrical quality. There is a variety in the structure of the kritis, too, which attracted me to them. The Maharaja has set all the pieces to all three kalapramanams, which gives a great feel while performing. The Maharaja being a Srividya upasaka,

has mentioned the Goddess in all his compositions and has also included the name of the ragas in each work. It is my fond wish to notate all the compositions, I have made a start with 31 kritis of my choice, and I hope I can do the rest.

Personal journey

My first guru was my mother. Our house in Delhi was always a host to many musicians from Chennai during my childhood. During one such visit, T.M. Thyagarajan agreed to be my teacher. Thus started my journey in the realm of Carnatic classical music. After my marriage, when I relocated to Chennai, I joined the music college for formal and theoretical training in music. There to my pleasant surprise, my teacher was Thyagarajan Sir. From that time onwards, there was no looking back. I did a stint of teaching at the Singapore Fine Arts Society and also at Kalakshetra, where I used to sing for their dance productions.

On guru bhakti

Whatever I am today is due to my guru, who has been my guiding light. During my tutelage, he encouraged me to participate in all the music competitions and under his guidance, I won many prizes. Seeing my efforts rewarded was a matter of great pride and satisfaction. My guru was very good at notating. In fact, due to this talent, his guru Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer asked him to write the notations. He has done so for many a Maharaja Swati Tirunal composition. I imbibed my notation writing skills from him and have tried to stick to the style taught by him.

(Bhavani Ravindran is a connoisseur of music and dance)