

## **Evolution of Carnatic music- a series**

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few months, we have looked at the evolution of Carnatic music, and how it has changed and adapted to changes in the social and political environment. Starting from the time of the Vedas, we traced the journey of Carnatic music and looked at the influence of social reformist movements such as the *Veerashaiva* movement, *Bhakti* movement, etc. We now reach a point in time when the British established rule in India. It is but natural then to expect that the British Raj would also have influenced the prevailing music system(s) in India.

It is said that after the Indian Railways, the violin is the most important contribution bequeathed to India by the British. The violin owes its origin to Europe- specifically Italy and Germany somewhere around the 16th century. The Indian stringed instruments included primarily the *veena*, the *sarangi*, etc. The *sarangi* was mainly used for Hindusthani music and was not a very good match for Carnatic music. Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the violin was introduced in India and since then, it has become an inseparable element of Carnatic music.

There are three people who are credited with the introduction of the violin in India. The first was Balaswami Dikshitar, brother of the famous Carnatic composer- Muthuswamy Dikshitar. Balaswami was introduced to western music at a performance by a European orchestra attached to the East India Company. He was fascinated by the violin and trained on it for some years before adapting it to Carnatic music.

Varahappa Iyer, another musician was very close to the British governor in Madras. Among all the instruments in the governor's band, he realized that the violin could be best adapted to Carnatic music because of its ability to mimic the tonal variations in the human voice.

The person largely responsible for violin becoming an accepted instrument in Carnatic music was Vadivelu- a resident musician of the composer king Swathi Tirunal. His encouragement and patronage of this instrument led to the violin becoming the prime accompaniment for a vocal musician. As the violin became more integrated with Carnatic music, the violin playing techniques also changed to suit the needs of Carnatic music. Today, the violin is regarded as the best possible accompaniment for vocal concerts due to its ability to sustain continued notes, which provides a lot of support and stability to the concert.

Till we meet next time, do listen to any recordings that you can find of Carnatic music. More often than not, the violin will be the accompanying instrument. You can then get an idea of the important role that violin plays in today's Carnatic concerts.

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