

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few columns, we have looked at the influence of royal patronage on Carnatic music. Last month, we looked at the contributions of the Mysore kings to Carnatic music; this month, I would like to discuss the contribution of the famous composer king Maharajah Swathi Thirunal.

Sri Swathi Thirunal (1813-1846) was the ruler of the state of Travancore, now a part of Kerala state. He came from a family well versed in music and started his formal education at a young age. Sri Swathi Thirunal was adept in multiple languages such as Malayalam, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and even English and Persian. He had a deep love for music right from the beginning and showed keen interest and insight in both music and literature.

It was this reputation as a great patron of the arts that led a number of musicians, dancers and writers from all over to take residence at his court. The court musician Eramman Thampi was a great composer and he composed what is perhaps the most famous Malayalam lullaby *Omanathingal Kidavo*. The Tanjore quartet (a set of four brothers) who were experts in multiple areas of music and dance were also part of Sri Swathi Thirunal's court. One of the four brothers was Vadivelu; many of the readers may remember that he is one of the people who is credited with the introduction of the violin into Carnatic music. (Refer Saathee magazine issue May 2011) It was the patronage and support that musicians received from rulers such as Sri Swathi Thirunal that made possible multiple advances in Carnatic music. The Maharaja also had great appreciation for Hindusthani music and many Hindusthani artistes received patronage at his court.

As a composer, Sri Swathi Thirunal composed over 400 compositions in multiple languages. Some of his famous compositions include *Deva deva Kalayami te* in the *Raga Mayamalavagowla* and *Sarasaksha Paripalaya Mamayi* in *Raga Pantuvarali*. The famous *thillana Gita dhuniku taka dhim* in *Raga Dhanashri* is a popular presentation not only on the concert platform but also for classical dance (Bharatanatyam) presentations. He used the *ankita* (signature) *Padmanabha* (and other variations of this signature) in his compositions.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the composition *Bhavayaami Raghuramam*. Originally composed in the *Raga Saveri*, it has been tuned to a *Ragamalika* (multiple ragas) by the legendary musician Semmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer- this is now the most popular way of presenting this composition. You can listen to a beautiful rendition by M.S. Subbulakshmi on the internet.

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