

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few columns, we looked at the rise of women in the field of Carnatic music. Starting out initially as composers, women became seasoned performers of Carnatic music concerts. This month, our journey in the field of Carnatic music continues as we look at changes that arose in the post-independence era.

Readers may recall from past columns, that royal rulers like the Maharajas of Mysore, Maharaja Swathi Tirunal among others not only were great patrons of music, but also were composers and performers themselves. To a large extent, prior to Indian independence, Carnatic music had always enjoyed royal patronage. As a result, many musicians had the luxury of taking to music full-time without having to worry about making a living.

As India neared and gained independence, Carnatic music also faced democratization. Patronage shifted from *Rajas* (kings) and *zamindars* (landlords) to governmental and non-governmental organizations. Musicians also had to face the fact that not all of them could take to music full-time; many musicians had to pursue a professional career in addition to their performing career in music, the combination of which provided them the means to earn a reasonable livelihood. Many present-day professional musicians, if not currently, would at some point of time in their life have straddled a parallel career to their performing career in music.

In the absence of the patronage of the kings, the general public began to play more of a role in determining when, where and if a musician performed. Audience patronage today is perhaps the most important factor in determining a musician's success since it translates into revenues for the organizers. Today's audiences are a varied lot and performers have to cater to various audience strata. Audiences consist of people speaking different languages, different age groups, serious students of music, *rasikas* (knowledgeable listeners) as well as lay listeners. Hence the performer has to have variety in the concert presentation to cater to these various segments.

As travel became easier, musicians frequently performed in various parts of the country. To appeal to the audiences at large, musicians had to tailor the content and format of the concerts. Today, depending on the part of the country that they have to perform in, most musicians make it a point to include a few compositions in the vernacular of that particular state.

As we near the completion of the series documenting the response of a traditional art, like Carnatic music, to contemporary realities, I would like to devote a column (or two!) to answer reader's questions, comments and thoughts. Till we meet next time, please do not hesitate to reach me via email or Facebook- I look forward to hearing from you.

Smitha Prasad is a Carnatic vocalist based in Cary, NC and can be reached at smitha_prasad@hotmail.com or www.facebook.com/smitha.k.prasad