

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

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, here is wishing you all a very happy, prosperous and musical 2012! We have indeed travelled a long road as we analyzed the evolution of Carnatic music and how it has responded to changes in the socio-political environment as a function of time. Well over a year ago, we started with the *Sama Veda* being the most likely source of Carnatic music; since then, we have travelled through the centuries tracing the way that Carnatic music despite being a traditional art has a nature dynamic enough to respond and reflect the state of the environment that it is a part of.

Last month, I described the role that Carnatic music and musicians played in India's quest for independence. No talk of Indian independence is complete without bringing in the 'Father of the Nation' - Mahatma Gandhi. This month, we will take a look at Gandhiji's influence on Carnatic music, a subject that unfailingly elicits raised eyebrows as people wonder how Gandhiji could have influenced Carnatic music!

A number of Carnatic musicians echoed Gandhi's call for a pacifist movement using the medium of Carnatic music. Prominent among them was the musician Smt. D. K. Pattammal, whose signature song 'Shanti Nilava Vendum' calling for world peace reiterated Gandhiji's message of non-violence and world peace. Another composition rendered by the famous musician Smt. M.L. Vasanthakumari is 'Ellorum Gandhi'. This composition, a movie track, called for people of all faiths to live as one, echoing Gandhi's famous quotation- 'I am a Muslim and a Hindu and a Christian and a Jew and so are all of you'.

A number of Gandhiji's favorite *bhajans* such as "Vaishnava Jana To" and the Meera *bhajan* "Hari Tum Haro" are also very popular among Carnatic musicians- they are frequently rendered as *tukkadas* (lighter pieces) in a concert. There is an interesting anecdote behind the composition "Hari Tum Haro"- when the legendary musician M.S. Subbulakshmi was initially invited to sing this *bhajan* for Gandhiji's birthday, she refused saying that she did not know the composition. Gandhiji is said to have remarked that he would rather hear M.S. 'say' the composition than have anyone else sing it! M.S. later had the composition tuned and recorded it for Gandhiji's birthday. This same recording was played on the radio following the announcement that Gandhiji had been assassinated. Carnatic concerts which are held on Gandhi Jayanthi (Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> each year to mark Gandhi's birthday) will invariably include some of Gandhiji's favorite *bhajans*.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the *bhajan* "Hari Tum Haro" rendered by Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi. You can easily find recordings by M.S. on the internet- the devotion in her voice is unparalleled!

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