

Music has enriched my life beyond my ability to describe it. I cannot imagine a life without music. I am lucky to have been introduced to it while young. Although I have listened to a variety of music, Carnatic Music has become my main interest because of my upbringing.

Carnatic Music is more formal and difficult to appreciate than other types of music. Ironically, you have to know music before you can appreciate it. This takes a lot of listening and also learning atleast the fundamentals. To identify a raga takes time and experience. Hindustani Music is easier to appreciate especially for Westerners-who think Indian Music is sitar music.

After years of listening to concerts live and to recorded music, going to Chennai for the Music Season in 1968 was a great thrill. Concerts that come to mind are by veterans like Ramanad Krishnan, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Alathoor Srinivasa Iyer, M.D. Ramanathan, Voleti Venkateswarulu, Palaghat K.V. Narayanaswamy, Nedanuri Krishnamurthy and the ladies-D.K. Pattammal, M.S. Subbulakshmi, M.L. Vasanthakumari, Mani Krishnaswamy and Radha-Jayalakshmi.

M.S. Subbulakshmi arriving at the Music Academy was a spectacle, causing a lot of excitement like the Queen of England. She was indeed the 'Queen of Music' as the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said.

I remember listening to a Ragam Thanam Pallavi by Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer – a great exponent in Pallavi singing-demonstrating a Simhanandana Thalam Pallavi accompanied by Lalgudi Jayaraman at the Music Academy-an event which is often spoke of. There is on-going discussion on the standard of music in that generation as compared to the present. There were a large number of musicians who commanded respect and admiration in my younger days. These were called 'stalwarts' and 'giants'. There are only a handful of men and women in the present generation who are highly regarded.

With the use of modern technology, students are able to record and listen to the teacher frequently for practice. They are also able to listen to a variety of musicians with differing styles. Compare this with the Gurukula system of learning. The student learnt a composition over a period of time and when the Guru felt disposed to do so. They were forbidden to listen to any other musician. However, this cannot explain why G.N. Balasubramanian and M.D. Ramanathan have totally different styles inspite of learning from the same Guru-Tiger Varadachariar! It is said that it was GNB who started singing Sangeeta Gnanamu in Dhanyasi in Madhyama Kala. MDR sang the same song in 2 kalai or Vilamba Kala.

Many compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar were sung in slow speed-including Vathapi in Hamsadwani. These were sped up to suit the concert style of singing. It is interesting to note that some of the present vocalists are singing the slower version-trying to revive tradition! 2 kalai compositions bring out the raga characteristics better than Madhyama Kala ones.

The standard of current day instrumentalists and accompanists is quite high. We may not call them 'giants' or 'stalwarts' but they all put up polished performances. I feel Carnatic Music is progressing well. Despite all the modern distractions , Carnatic Music continues to thrive and I hope it will continue to delight rasikas like me forever.