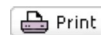




Lakshmipuram days & Madurai Mani Iyer's enchanting music!

By T.M. Anantharaman



BANGALORE, April 17: The road to “Kandan karunai puriyum vadivel”, coincidentally also in raga Jaunpuri, is also a long journey, and I have enjoyed every melody that came my way over the years and these were, in fact, the years I can truly describe as the “musically haunting melodious years”.

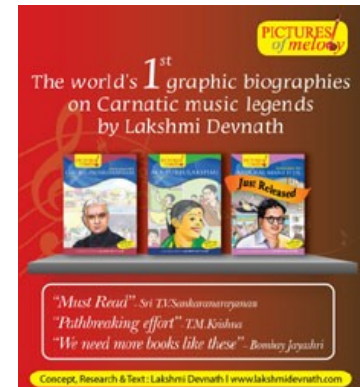
From unknown Noor Jehan or Shamshad Begum to the poetry of Bharatiyar and exposure to Carnatic music and ragas such as Jaunpuri were the musical milestones that I crossed, and from there for me, in my formative years, to the transition to the music of well-known Carnatic music maestros such as Madurai Mani Iyer, GNB and MS et al was (and, in many ways, it still is) an incredibly fulfilling

journey.

If you agree, I would like to take you on a swift ride into the voices that held me in a thrall in music over the decades.

‘Vowel sangeetham’

I will begin with Lakshmipuram in Madras where I, as a young man, was living with my uncles and



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exposed to the delights of Carnatic music. All my uncles were deeply ingrained into Carnatic music, and Madurai Mani Iyer was unquestionably popular with them. Little wonder, over time, I too began to like the cut and thrust style of Madurai Mani Iyer's music. My dad had once described it as "vowel sangeetham".

Of Mani Iyer's music, two characteristics fascinated me. One his staccato style, and the other his penchant for slurring over words and making a kind of squeaking sound, un heard of until then in the Carnatic music system. That Madurai Mani Iyer was also a past master in the art of swara prasthara I discovered over the years and he imparted a distinct lilt and cadence to the sapta swaras, so much so that many connoisseurs in the audience swooned with "ooho's" and "aahaaa's" whenever Mani Iyer began to explore the intricacies in an extempore fashion.

But most of all, rasikas and novices like me waited with bated breath to hear him sing ditties like "Sarasa sama dhana beda dhanda chadura" in raga Kapinarayani or "Eppo var uvaro endan kali theera" in raga Jaunpuri or "Kapali" in Mohanam or "Kana Kan kodi vendum" in Kambodi. His raga oeuvres - be it in Ranjani, Kambodi, Mohanam or Keeravani - simply transported us to sheer bliss and for days together we used to reflect and relish the "unusual pidigal" (rare phrases) and try to hum his music in our "bathroom singing" sessions.

Staccato style

Madurai Mani Iyer's staccato style, we learnt in later years, was because of his failing health. Nevertheless, his concerts always almost attracted huge audience participation and many in the crowd would wait for hours together just to hear him sing "kandan karunai purium vadivel" in raga Abheri or the English notes. In fact, almost all concerts of his ended with a clamour from people in the auditorium shouting "n otes, notes!" and Mani Iyer always obliged. The starting phrase "Ga pa ma riga ma riga sa" sent the people into euphoric exultations. I too was immersed in the lilt of the English notes and swayed to its tempo. It took me several years to learn the nuances of the notes and attempt to sing them with ease and grace in the typical Madurai Mani Iyer style but never able to achieve the rhythmic cadence he imparted to these notes. In the Abheri raga piece "Kandan Karunai purium vadivel", I particularly liked the jerk and twist he gave to the words "andam adidum" with the ending "adidum becoming adiduiii" something unique having its own peculiar flavour. It was not Tamil poetry when he slurred over the words but what the hell it was haunting melody and I and hundreds of others, including my venerable uncles, were floating in rarified outer space and were experiencing inexplicable goose bumps and soaring in happiness. That's what Madurai Mani Iyer's music did to us and I want to acknowledge the countless hours of sheer musical pleasure he gave us in his time. Thank you dear sir for bringing un-quantifiable happiness to me and others with your magical music. Namaste Madurai Mani Iyer saab!

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