

M.D. RAMANATHAN - Music Divine

by S. RAJARAM, Director, Kalakshethra Foundations

"The accent on Bhava is the essence of music. After all, the core of our classical tradition is nadopasana and bhakti is its soul. The devotee or bhakta, even as he is in the process of nadopasana, enters bhava, while raga, tala and other technicalities are subject to the essentials of bhava". These are MDR's words, which amply describe the essence of his music. MDR lived music and he had no life other than music. He never went after name or fame and lived a contended life in Kalakshetra, exuding lustre all round like his mentor.

ॐ नमोः प्रतिकूलानि
न परेषां समाचरेत् ॥

Thus says Vyasa Bhagavan and whenever I think of MDR, these words come to my mind. Noble and humble, he never spoke high of his own music, nor did he deprecate other Vidwans, never harmed any one nor hurt any body's feelings - an ajatha satru.

A great devotee of Tyagaraja Swamy, "Varada Dasa" always spoke about Tyagaraja or his guru, revered Tiger Varadachariar. His guru-bhakti is perhaps, unparalleled. Whenever his admirers compared his music with that of his guru he would say "Please do not for a moment think that these are my achievements. I have not come across a greater 'bhavagna' than my guru, whose music was instinct with a depth of feeling and inner harmony that has left a profound impression on me. I have only endeavoured to cultivate as much of these musical traits of my guru as has been possible for me". Describing his first meeting with his guru, he says "I had the privilege of meeting Tiger Varadachariar, first, when I went for an interview to join the Sangita Siromani Course in Kalakshetra. There, when I came face to face with the master, I instinctively felt that I was in the presence of a very great man. Apart from his music, I felt magnetically attracted to him and in him I found my ideal conception of a great master musician". This feeling was mutual and the guru treated him as his own son. Ramanathan often used to recall this incident. "The year before the passing away of my guru, a function, in the nature of an arangetram, to introduce me to the lovers of music in Madras, was arranged by Rukmini Devi in Kalakshetra and the late T.R. Venkatarama

Sastry presided over it. My guru also addressed the gathering and his words spoken then are still ringing in my ears- "Today, I am transferring to this young man whatever learning I have in music and pray that the rasikas should bring him up and keep the torch of our music tradition burning". MDR practically lived with his guru and fully imbibed the Tiger style.

I had the good fortune of knowing Tiger Varadachariar well and listening to his music often. Tiger was Mysore Asthana Vidwan and used to visit Mysore often and whenever he was in Mysore, he never failed to visit my grandfather, Mysore Vasudevachar. There are several occasions when both Tiger and Tatha, both disciples of Patnam Subramanya Iyer, used to sing a particular raga together for hours together. MDR always used to accompany his guru on such tours and Tiger's money-purse used to be with MDR; such was the confidence Tiger had in MDR.

His deep bass voice, rich in timbre had few equals in the music world. When I was in All India Radio, Delhi as Director of Programmes I had an ambition of bringing MDR and Ustad Amir Khan Sahab on the same platform for a Jugalbandi. Ustad Amir Khan had a similar sonorous bass voice and his music was as enchanting and appealing as MDR's. But my ambition remained only a dream.

MDR's rendering of krithis, full of bhava and bhakti would touch one's heart and take you traversing through the path of bhakti to realise "nada bramham".

Hailing from Kerala, Manjapara Ramanathan inherited a legacy of music. His father Devesa Bhagavatar and his uncle Krishna Bhagavatar were good musicians. He was so devoted to Rukmini Devi and Kalakshetra, his alma mater, he never thought of leaving Kalakshetra, though he had several very attractive offers. He breathed his last serving Kalakshetra.

An artiste of his Calibre, I personally feel did not get the recognition he deserved; Mysterious are the ways of God and who are we to question!