

SRIPADA PINAKAPANI The singing doctor

Jayalakshmi Sekhar

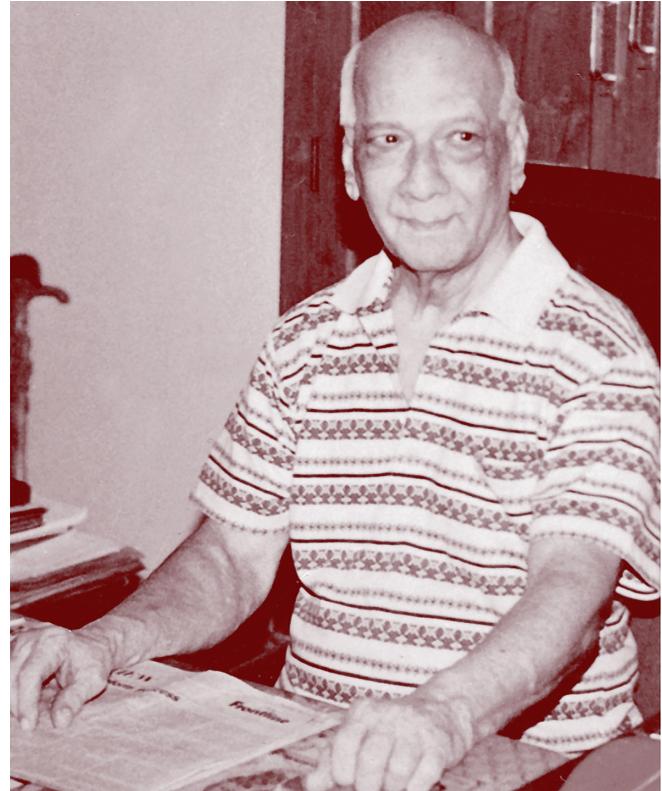
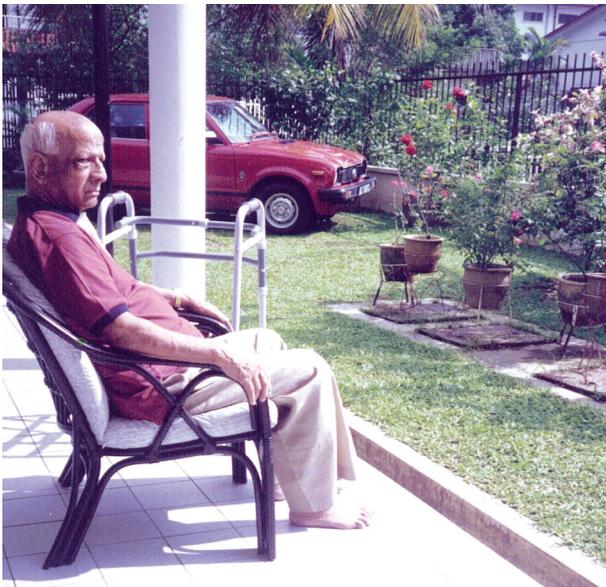
From April 1978 to November 1994, I listened to Dr. Pinakapani's voice over and over again – thanks to my husband T.V. Sekhar, who introduced me to the music he had recorded during his visits to Kurnool. I started visiting Dr. Sripada Pinakapani together with Sekhar from 1979 onwards.

My earlier guru-s were my father C.S. Krishnaswamy who introduced me to music, and Pudukottai Jayarama Iyer who taught me so much about the veena for about ten years. By attending several concerts of such stalwarts as Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, K.V. Narayanaswamy, Voleti Venkateswarulu, Nedunuri Krishnamurthy, Nookala Chinna Sathyanarayana, D.K. Jayaraman and Lalgudi Jayaraman, I was able to understand what great, traditional classical music sounded like and moulded my musical thoughts, though they took their final shape under the tutelage of Dr. Pinakapani.

Later on when Lalgudi Sir taught me his compositions – he sang and I learnt to play them on the veena – he was full of praise for the doctor. He expressed great respect for him as a musician.

We owe a great deal to the late G.N.S. Raghavan who

Dr. Pinakapani in Kuala Lumpur

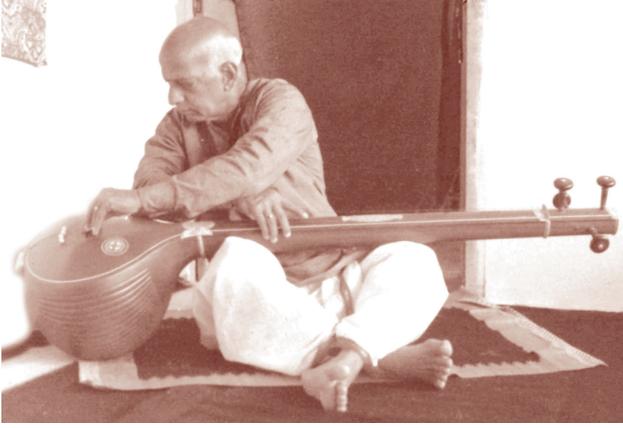


recorded Pinakapani's music for several years. When we called on him in Delhi he gave us a copy of his entire collection.

Dr. Pinakapani visited Malaysia and Singapore in 1994 on our invitation. He gave some performances with me accompanying him on the violin, while at home, he taught me several kriti-s, padam-s and javali-s on the veena. After his return to Kurnool, Sekhar wrote to him asking him to take me as his student.

He readily agreed, explaining in detail what it takes to sacrifice everything in life for music. I told him I was ready for the challenge to learn from him if he taught me – as music had always been my passion, and with Sekhar's encouragement in every possible way, I could put my heart and soul into the great guru's teaching. I promised never to forget the one important word he told me – "noneotherness," if you wanted to achieve anything in life.

MY GURU



From November 1994 till 1998, I started visiting Kurnool, staying there for two months each time. I made three trips a year, spending about five hours a day with my guru – notating and practising. Even while he was writing his books, he would spare 2-1/2 hours in the morning and 2-1/2 hours in the evening. I would be ready with the veena and my recorder when he called “Jayamma” from his room. He never used a book; he taught from memory.

It was not very difficult to understand him as I had spent 15 years listening to his music before asking him to teach me in person. I know that the personal touch, the one-to-one learning, can never be replaced by recorders.

The doctor was very particular about some of the most important factors in our music – anuswaram-s, rava jati sangati-s, the balance between gamaka phrases and plain notes. Tension in phrases was another important factor and many times he would comment that I was not getting the right tension when I played. By “tension”

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he meant the time taken by each phrase relative to the underlying tempo taken up for the kriti.

He strictly combined Veena Dhanammal’s techniques and Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar’s music to form a wholesome vocal style of his own. People who know him call it the ‘Pani bani’.

He used to tell me about calculations or kanakku, saying that it was a science which should not be ignored or neglected. It should be sung and the swaraprastara should be based on intelligently arranged calculations as well as melody.

He always laid emphasis on the Dakshinadi bani or Tanjavur bani. All the great musicians he mentions are from the south.

My time spent in Kurnool with the great musician taught me so much of his high discipline – teaching, writing books, notating, and even learning. He never felt he was too great to learn from anyone who had some song that he did not know. The humility in him is something I can never forget. He would scold me if I offered him fees. He accepted only one rupee from me.

He was fond of naming three professions we should not make money from – medicine, teaching Sanskrit and teaching music.

Living in Kurnool, I learnt sufficient Telugu to be able to read, write and speak the language. Thus I could read Dr. Pinakapani’s books *Sangeeta Saurabham* and *Manodharma Sangeetam*. These books are outstanding textbooks on music and if you read them and diligently practise what they contain, you can develop many excellent ideas. For example, in *Manodharma Sangeetam*, he has spelt out every possible combination of swara-s. They are an inexhaustible source of musical ideas to the learner or the performing musician.

Pinakapani’s pathantaram is among the best and his repertoire vast. They help the performer to make memorable music, and give a wholesome effect to concerts. When the pathantaram is good, the concert is bound to be a success.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Pinakapani, one of the greatest music guru-s, for what he has given me: ‘life in music and music in life.’