

Here is the acceptance speech that I had prepared to give but could not do so due to paucity of time.

Namaskaram

Firstly I would like to thank the Shri Shanmukhanada Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha for having chosen to present their National Eminence Award to me this year. For a musician like me who generally comes out feeling very good about oneself more often than not, just a glance at the list of previous awardees is enough to give me an inferiority complex. To say that I am honoured to receive this today is an understatement and a bigger admission of false modesty than those that get reported in the media.

My family has had a long association with this organisation for many decades. My grand uncle Shri S Krishnaswamy (popularly known as Jagadhi mama) was one of the founding members. My father Sankaran has appeared on this stage several times during his years as a member of Cho's Ramaswamy's Drama troupe in the sixties and early seventies. I have not had the chance to sing in this auditorium before it was rebuilt. However I made my first appearance in the sabha's inaugural Youth music festival held at the SIES school. I was also delighted to be invited to perform the first performance in the newly built auditorium just before the formal inauguration. I can never forget the particularly special relationship that I have shared with Mr Seshadri, the former Secretary of the sabha. The sabha has retained its preeminent status in the Mumbai cultural scene thanks specially to the dynamic and forward thinking vision of its President, Shri Shankar. I will always be thankful to the Shanmukhanada sabha and to Shri Shankar for giving me the opportunity to spend 24 hours with the legendary Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer in 2002.

Carnatic music has had a good innings as a performing art thanks largely to the patronage of kings, zamindars and wealthy and landed gentry especially in the nineteenth century. The early twentieth century created the sabha as the perfect community organisation that was suited for promoting and nurturing the classical arts. It is to sabhas that Carnatic music owes much especially the last 100 years or so. The Shanmukhanada Sabha has definitely played a premier role in this and it is with great pleasure that I would like express my thanks and appreciation to this great organisation.

I belong to family of Carnatic music rasikas. Starting from members of my grandparents' generation we have been passionate lovers of this beautiful art form. My uncles and aunts were equally involved in the art and many more of them learnt the music formally. My grand aunt Smt Rukmini Rajagopalan who was also my guru, belonged to the generation when cricket still distinguished between Gentlemen and Players. She called herself an amateur in the true sense of the word and her skill sets were good enough to be on par with the best of the pros. My parents wanted me and my siblings to learn music only because they wanted the next generation of rasikas to be built up. A combination of good fortune, good teachers, hard work and support from an understanding audience I have managed and continue to make a decent living as a Carnatic musician.

I began learning Carnatic music on the violin with Shri V Lakshminarayana. He grilled me in the foundations of this music. A combination of accidents and laziness ensured that the vocalists of that time had better violinists to accompany them. Smt Rukmini Rajagopalan was first a rasika and then a musician. The rasika in her drove her to learn from as many sources possible including Parur Sundaram Iyer, Papanasam Sivan, Koteeswara Iyer, GNB, Alathur Brothers and T Brinda. She passed on this vast experience to me wholeheartedly without holding anything back. I shall never forget one particular piece of advice she gave "Listen to all concerts. Some will tell you how you should sing while others will tell you how you should not!"

My guru Calcutta Krishnamurthy was a product of the wonderful gurukulam like system that was in vogue at the Annamalai University in the forties. He taught me how to think as a musician. He encouraged me to come out of my comfort zone and challenge myself continuously. His favourite phrase "All ragas are beautiful. It is the responsibility of the musician to bring out the innate beauty in them" Shri Sembanarkoil SRD Vaidyanathan passed away exactly one year ago. He was another guru who gave everything he had to me. Importantly he taught me how to sing with abandon and freedom the way the Nadaswara vidwans played in the open.

In my years as a performing artiste I have had some of the most wonderful musicians accompanying me on the stage. I will always be thankful of their patience and understanding especially when I

indulge in pyrotechnics that may not exactly suit their own aesthetics. It is at those moments that I appreciate their sensitivity even more. I am particularly thankful to Shri Varadarajan and Shri Neyveli Venkatesh for their brilliance, support and sensitivity. I am also thankful to Shri Venkatramanan who is accompanying me today on the Khanjira. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the other awardees today and wish them all the very best in their musical pursuits.

Finally I am happy to say that Carnatic music as a performing art has boldly entered the 21st century shrugging aside the fears of many who thought the art may die. This is due to a whole new generation of musicians who have had the courage to stick it out and make something out of it. It is also due to the ever increasing audience that one sees growing in large numbers. Of course there will be changes and like everything else in life we have the capacity to move on and take these changes into our strides. After all we do have "Chakkani raja margam" that we trust in.