

# Gayakasikhamani Dr. L. Muthiah Bhagavathar's Contribution to Sree Swathi Thirunal's Compositions

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Sri Muthiah Bhagavathar of Harikesanallur, was invited in the year 1936 by H. H. the Maharaja of Travancore to present the History of the State in the form of a Harikatha on the occasion of the Pallikkettu of Princess Karthika Thirunal. Accepting the invitation, Sri Bhagavathar studied the History of Travancore, with the help of Professor R. Srinivasan and presented the same as a Harikatha under the title 'Chitrodayam'. In the portion of the harikatha wherein the reign of Sree Swathi Thirunal had to be described, Sri Bhagavathar expounded the Maharaja's greatness as a king, a scholar, a patron of literature and fine arts and particularly as a musician and composer revealing his devotion to Lord Padmanabha, illustrating the same from the Maharaja's compositions in Sanskrit, Malayalam, Hindustani and Karnataka with proper tunes. Amazed at this, the members of the Royal family of Travancore honoured the Bhagavathar with royal gifts and entrusted him with the noble work of popularising Sri Swathi Thirunal's compositions.

Sri Bhagavathar set himself to the task of collecting Sree Swathi Thirunal's compositions. Manuscripts of the Maharaja's krithis had to be collected from various places and palaces in Travancore. He spared no pains in the collection and compilation work. Some of the works were half finished; that is to say that all songs were not written out completely with the necessary musical notations denoting Raga, Thala etc., And it is in this aspect of the art of making the songs ready for the musician (பதத்தை கச்சிதப்படுத்த வேறு) that Sri Bhagavathar has contributed in a

very large measure to the popularisation of Sree Swathi Thirunal's Krithis. Maharaja's Krithis in Melakarta Ragas like Vachaspathi, Natakapriya, Bhavapriya, Shanmukhapriya, Rishabapriya, Simhendramadhyamam and in rare Ragas like Hamsanandi, Mohanakalyani, Bhooshavali, Pushpalatika, Kundalavarali Garudadhvani, to mention only a few, are songs presented by Sri Bhagavathar. He took special care to see that in his rendering, the songs do not lose their innate greatness, beauty, sense, meaning and bhava. This was possible for him since he was himself a vaggeyakaraka (a composer of music). His bhakthi, high literary attainments and philosophical outlook fitted him admirably to the task he had been entrusted with. Being a scholar himself he was attracted so much to the work that he preferred to be an honorary worker as a guest of the palace rather than as a paid employee.

When about fivehundred Kirthanams were got ready to be released, Bhagavathar suggested to Their Highnesses the appointment of famous musicians of South India as Palace Vidwans so that the songs may be popularised. Their Gracious Highnesses readily agreed with the proposal and musicians of repute like Sarvasri Semmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer, Musiri Subramonia Iyer, Alathur Brothers, G. N. Balasubramoniam, Papa Venkitaramaier, Rajamanickom Pillai, Palghat Mani Iyer, Palani Subramonia Pillai and others were appointed as Palace Vidwans. Swathi Thirunal's compositions were sung by these musicians in many platforms in South India and the music lovers welcomed the songs.

It can be seen that Sri Bhagavathar had a substantial hand in the popularisation of the Maharaja's krithis.

With a view to give more intensive publicity to the songs he again suggested to Their Highnesses the starting of a School for training the bhagavathars in the schools of the Travancore State. This suggestion of the Bhagavathar also met with the approval of Their Highnesses and very soon an institution for teaching music was started in Trivandrum, with Sri Bhagavathar as its head, under the name Sri Swathi Thirunal Academy of Music. Many Bhagavathars employed in the school then, thus got a chance to learn Swathi Thirunal's Krithis from Sri Bhagavathar. Sri Bhagavathar as its Honorary Principal and Sarvasri N. V. Narayana Bhagavathar and M. A. Kalyanakrishna Bhagavathar as Professors, the Academy provided instruction in vocal music with particular attention to Maharaja's Krithis. This attracted musically talented girls and boys. Veena, Violin, Mridangom and Dance were introduced as courses of study one by one. As a mark of recognition of its services to the cause of music the institution was raised to the status of a College in the year 1962.

This institution has completed thirty years of meritorious service. With the staunch support of the Government and the public it had its Silver Jubilee celebrated in due pomp and colours and it is hoped that further Jubilees will also be celebrated in due course with more pomp and enthusiasm. It cannot but be so, for, it was the mastermind of Dr. Muthiah Bhagavathar that worked in the collection, edition and popularisation of Sri Swathi Thirunal's Krithis. Sri Bhagavathar has also published books containing more than hundred kirthanams of the Maharaja, with musical notations.

The above has been written with the full conviction that a few words about Sri Bhagavathar who was in a large measure responsible for the Jubilee celebrations will only be appropriate and necessary. I am both proud and gratified to state that as a disciple of the Bhagavathar I had the fortune to be always at his services in the matter of collection and edition of the Maharaja's Krithis. Further I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude to Their Highnesses and Lord Padmanabha for having given me a chance as a teacher in this institution in which my Guru worked.