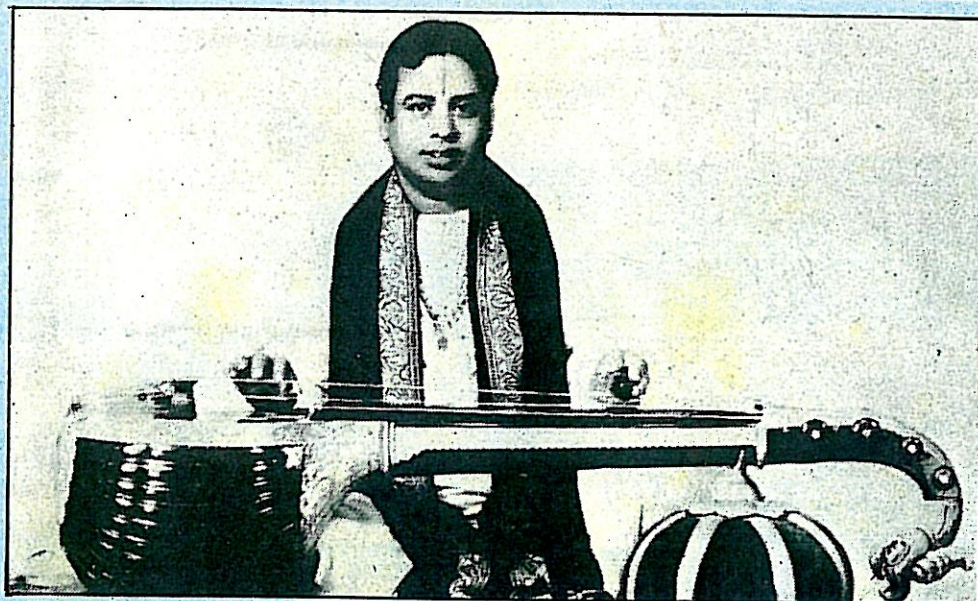


Ancient instrument

GOTTUVADYAM is said to be one of the oldest musical instruments. Also called mahanataka veena or hanumadvēna, it resembles a veena. In the veena the places producing the notes are fixed by frets and swaras are produced by pressing the left hand fingers on the required frets. In gottuvadyam, notes are produced by gliding a cylindrical piece of wood or horn called 'gotu' over the strings with the left hand, while the right hand fingers pluck the strings. It is placed horizontally on the floor and played.

Gottuvadyam has 21 strings; six main strings, three strings for maintaining drone and rhythm and 12



■ The grandfather Gottuvadyam Narayana Iyengar

strings for sympathetic vibration. All the sympathetic strings are provided with minute adjustments to enhance the richness of tonal quality.

Hanuman is said to be

the deity for this instrument. It is mentioned in Telugu work *Shringara Savithri* by Raghunatha Naika (17th century). It was reintroduced in Carnatic music by Tiruvudaimarudur Sakharama Rao

and further popularised by Gottuvadyam Narayana Iyengar (1906-1959), a court musician of Mysore. Budalur Krishnamurthy Shastry was another well-known gottuvadyam maestro.

Now he is a young man capable of looking after himself. Now I am turning all my attention to my younger children," he says.

Yet, Ravi Kiran's career matters are entirely managed by Narasimhan. Ravi Kiran may have played just about 300 to 400 concerts till date as opposed to other prodigies who play some 3,000 in a couple of years. But Ravi Kiran gets the same billing as a Bismillah Khan or Ravi Shankar. (Ravi Shankar once said: "If you do not believe in God look at Ravi Kiran.")

Narasimhan is accused of charging exorbitant fees for a Ravi Kiran concert. He elaborates on it: "What is the 'rate' for a musician? It is 'sanmana' or honour for his prowess and skill in pleasing one's ear and mind and intellect. So when a musician can give up the peace and quiet of a home practice for the tension of a public concert, and the audience is eager...I believe he should be paid the compensation for his loss.

So when there are big fetes in north India, Narasimhan demands the same

rate for Ravi Kiran as paid to the north Indian stars. Be it Amjad Ali Khan or Hari Prasad Chaurasia ("it is a normal practice to pay a south Indian musician less than half of the north Indian rate").

It is not all paid concerts for Ravi Kiran: one day he went to the Anantha

By the time he was two, Ravi Kiran could identify the raga and tala of any Carnatic song. In his third year he had a repertoire of about 60 varnas, 35 alankaras and a number of kritis. He could also identify 400 ragas and 175 talas.

Padmanabha Swamy temple and played continuously for 24 hours. And he happily recounts the musical yajna that he organised in August 1987. Over 500 artistes took part in the yajna conducted at the Anantha Padmanabha Swamy temple for 72 hours. "The yajna was in prayer only. What can musicians do but pray? I had been disturbed by the terrible news we read every day of natural and man-made calamities. I wondered if there was something musicians could do. We know we can only pray. I wanted to find out if we could pray collectively. The response was tremendous. We know music cannot move mountains, but it can move hearts. At least for 72 hours it rained, music!"

On the eve of yet another tour of Europe and USA, Ravi Kiran was holding a family concert with his brother and sister and smiling indulgently at Ganesh (see box). The soothing music of the quartet fills the room. It is the music of born musicians and one closes one's eyes in communion.

—V.R. DEVIKA