



# SRUTI NOTES

## SRUTI

The India Music & Dance Society

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### From The Editors

Dear Patrons:

With the election of the new board of directors of SRUTI, a new library committee has been formed. This is the first SRUTI Notes prepared by the new library committee. In addition to the usual features like the letter from the newly elected president and a review of Bombay Jayashri's concert, starting with this issue we are planning on offering three new columns meant for active participation of the readers. In this issue T. Sarada has presented two versions of the story behind the reason for the Mudra of Purandara Dasa. It is up to you readers to challenge the facts of the story. We have also presented a detailed meaning and commentary on the famous Thyagaraja's kirtana 'Paramathmudu...'

I strongly encourage our patrons to actively participate in our efforts by sending your suggestions, comments and contributions. After all this is a good learning experience where in you do something different from what you do in your day-to-day life. We look forward to an active participation from our readers. We are also requesting the readers as well as the members of SRUTI to send their suggestions in the choice of a mission statement (or slogan) to be used in our future publication.

We are deeply grieved to report the sudden demise of one of our founding member of SRUTI, Dr. C.P. Ramaswamy on January 11, 2002. Details are found in the Obituary section.

The junior members of our newly formed library committee are Akhila Vastare, Archana Ram, Chetan Ramamurthy and Janani Prabhakar. Other members of the library committee are Venkatraman Visweswaran, T. Sarada. We look forward to seeing you all during our Thyagaraja aradhana on March 2, 2002.

Sincerely

P. Swaminathan (chairman)  
For the library committee

### UPCOMING SRUTI PROGRAMS IN 2002

#### Thyagaraja Aradhana

(March 2, 2002, Hindu Temple, Berlin New Jersey)

#### Maestro Shashank (Flute)

(March 23, 2002 Gwynedd-Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA)

#### Ustad Shahid Pervez Khan (Sitar Recital)

(April 27, venue to be announced)

#### Alarmel Valli (Bharatanatyam)

(May 18, 2002, venue to be announced)

### SRUTI Concert Tapes

Recorded music tapes of SRUTI concerts are available for distribution among the patrons of Sruti. To receive any of these tapes, please contact P. Swaminathan at 215-643-2145 or send an email to [panchanadam@hotmail.com](mailto:panchanadam@hotmail.com).

*The opinions expressed by the contributors of articles and reviews are published in a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti's Board or its members.*

## From the President's Desk

Dear friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of SRUTI, I welcome you all to the start of an exciting series of programs at SRUTI for the next two years. At the outset, we thank P. Narayanan and other members of the outgoing Board, the Resource Committee and the Library Committee for their dedicated service to SRUTI during the past two years and their help in the transfer of all of SRUTI's business affairs to the current Board and committees. Their continued support, as also the support of other past administrations and SRUTI's membership is very important to us in achieving our mission - presenting high quality performances in the field of Indian classical music and dance, propagating these arts through educative programs, and enhancing awareness about these arts among all art lovers in the region, Indian and non-Indian.

During the fifteen years since its inception, SRUTI has established itself as a premier cultural organization in the Delaware Valley. As a non-profit organization, we have come a long way in achieving financial stability. In recent years, we have also come to rely heavily on financial assistance from corporations, granting agencies and private foundations in presenting high quality programs (this is because the costs involved - artist fees, auditoriums, publicity, etc, have increased significantly, while income from membership and ticket sales have not kept pace). The Resource Committee will be working hard to raise programming funds and I thank Akkaraju Sarma (Chairman, with considerable experience in other organizations) and Dinakar Subramanian (former president, who has served on the committee during the last four years) for accepting to steer these efforts.

The Library Committee brings out the annual publication *Sruti Ranjani* and the quarterly *Sruti Notes*, a newsletter launched four years ago to be a medium of communication between SRUTI's administration and its members, in addition to presenting reviews, articles and news. I thank P. Swaminathan (Chairman, former president), T. Sarada and Venkatraman Visweswaran for accepting to handle these tasks. They come with a lot of new ideas and enthusiasm.

An important task of the current Board in the immediate future will be to strive to increase SRUTI's membership and widen the audience base. We appeal to all non-members who have been receiving our communications for several years (many of you attend SRUTI's programs) to please support the organization by becoming members. We also request our life members to consider becoming patron members. Your support, which will help create a strong financial foundation for SRUTI, will be deeply appreciated. Please call any of the Board members for information.

This year's Thyagaraja Aradhana (on March 2) will feature a concert by Rajeswari Satish, an accomplished musician from New York, in addition to group music and individual participation in tribute to the great composer. Performances by Shashank, Alar-mel Valli and Ustad Shahid Pervez Khan have been scheduled for the spring and a bharathanatyam recital by Priyadarshini Govind for September. Other performances by highly talented artists are being planned. Please spread the word and attend all the programs.

Viji Swaminathan

President

For the Board of Directors

## Vocal Concert by Bombay Jayashri

Library Committee

On Nov 10, 2002 SRUTI hosted the vocal concert by Bombay Jayashri accompanied by Sriramkumar on violin and Arun Prakash on the mridangam. This was the last concert of the season for the year 2001. The concert took place in the Gwynedd Mercy College auditorium. This was the second time Jayashri performed for the SRUTI audience. Her first performance in 1995 was very well received. Having listened to first concert in 1995, we went to the concert hall with great hopes that she was going to give a solid performance. Despite the impressive rendition of a few krithis, we have to admit that we were less than satisfied, rather disappointed with her performance on that day. Bombay Jayashri's raga alapana is known for its clarity and precision. She could thrill the audience with her melodious, soft and soothing voice. However, none of these qualities of Jayashri prevailed on Nov 10 and her concert was less than exciting.

Jayashri started the concert with Swati Thirunal's krithi in purvakalyanai followed by the krithi '*Teliya Leru Rama..*' in *dhenuka*. This krithi by Thyagraja is known for its emotional appeal both for its meaning as well the raga; Jayashri brought out the beauty of the krithi by her emotional rendering. After rendering Papanasam Sivan's krithi *Karunanidhiye* in *bowli*, Jayashri elaborated Subbaraya Sastry's *Janani Ninnu Vina* in *reethi gowla*. Her raga alapana and the ensuing rendition of the krithi were very impressive. It is worthwhile to note that she rendered first line of the first charanam. During my 15 years of listening to SRUTI's concerts, I have not heard this particular charanam rendered by the other vocalists. I also noticed that instead of rendering the first charanam fully, she chose the first line of the first charanam for her niraval, which was done well. However, at the end of the improvisation, she completed the krithi by rendering the second half of the *anupallavi* (swara sahithyam).

A close look at the musical structures of *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and the three charanams indicates that the musical structures of the three charanams are the repetition of the musical structures found in the *pallavi* and *anupallavi*. Because of this musical repetition, performing artists (hence I guess that Bombay Jayashri) do not render all the charanams. However, (I am sure many of you may agree with me) there is no justification for not rendering the (chosen one) charanam fully. It will be interesting if some expert can explain the intention of Subbaraya Sastry when he composed this great krithi with the three charanams..

The highlight of the concert was the rendering of *Kaddanuvairiki* in *todi*. Jayashri gave a decent alapana. Sriramkumar's violin support was good. During the alapana some of us were expecting that Jayashri would choose one of *Lalgudi Pancharatnams* in *Todi* (earlier during the day we were discussing with Jayashri the importance of *Lalgudi Pancharatnams*). However, she chose the more familiar krithi *Kaddanuvairiki*. Having heard the krithi sung by many stalwarts (for SRUTI) in the past decade, we could not help but compare Jayashri's performance with others. On that day we felt Jayashri lacked her usual energy and power while rendering the krithi.

After this, she rushed through an RTP in *suruti* rendering

the *pallavi* ‘*Paramatma Parandhama Srirama*’. This RTP was a stripped down version without the usual *grahabedam* and *ragamalika kalpana swarams*. The post *pallavi* songs that followed were equally rushed through. Overall, we got the impression she wanted to finish the concert as quickly as possible.

Sriramkumar (on the violin) and Arun Prakash (on the *mridangam*) both lacked their usual form. Sriramkumar showed glimpses of his excellent skills while playing *reethi gowla* and partly during *todi*. In short, the artists gave the impression that they were not fully involved with their performance on that day.



## An Appeal From the Library Committee

Dear Reader,

With the changing of guards, the new library committee will add three new columns (described below) to SRUTI Notes. We hope that you will actively participate in this effort by giving your valuable comments and suggestions.

### 1. Reader’s Forum:

- **Fact or Fiction:** Two or three versions of the prevailing stories on a given subject (pertaining to either musicians, composers or a composition) will be published in SRUTI NEWS; we will request the readers either to validate, contradict or challenge the information contained in the story based on its source. The response will be published in the subsequent issue of SRUTI NEWS and the discussion will be left open depending on the degree of interest on the subject.
- **Notable Get-togethers:** Published accounts of the meetings between great composers, or great artists from different sources will be presented to the readers for their views and comments. (It is surprising that while all these great people lived during times when historical records could be maintained there are many stories circulating that are hard to believe, as historically true.)
- **Stories Behind Songs:** While some songs like the ‘*Anandamritakarshini*’ (of Dikshitar) and ‘*Tera tiyaga rada*’ (of Thyagaraja) are consistently attributed to a certain event, some other songs have different stories circulating from source to source. So the readers are invited to give their opinion on the published item and also present a new story for reader participation. The readers could also contribute any good anecdote or incidence that they know of, which would be of interest.

### 2. Discussion on Compositions:

In every issue, one or two *krithis* by great composers will be analyzed. We will provide the detailed meaning and interpretation by various critics. We invite contribution from the readers on the choice as well as presentation of compositions.

(Note – Responses can be sent by email to [sruti@sruti.org](mailto:sruti@sruti.org). Or users can start a new thread in the Discussion Board section of the SRUTI website at <http://www.sruti.org>.)

## Fact or fiction?

### Mudra, (Ankitam) of Sri Purandara Dasa,

Every one knows that the *mudras* are like ID’s inserted in musical compositions by the composer and there are different kinds of *mudras*. (More about these in a later issue.)

When the *Ankitam* is not truly a “*Vaggeyakara Mudra*”, i.e.,

giving his name in some form, the signature causes a lot of speculation as to the origin of the same. Here are two stories, fact or fiction (that is for you to decide), as to what prompted Purandara Dasa choose his *Mudra*.

1. Purandaradasa’s given name is Srinivasa Nayak. His family and friends called him Sinappa (1). He was born in a place called, “Purandara Ghatta”, near Pune (Poona) about 500 years back. He was highly influenced while growing up by the Hari Dasas, the wandering saints, who promoted *Bhakti Marga*. The combination of two words “Purandara” and Dasa” (admirer of Hari Dasas) gave rise to “Purandara” in his signature. (2)

2. The second story is more theatrical. This is presented by Harikatha Ratnakara Sri Balakrishna Sastrigal, on the life of Purandara Dasa, (3,4). While visiting Tirupati as a part of his religious tour, Sinappa noticed a courtesan, called Purandari, living across his house. Every night she would go out carrying her *vina* and come back in the morning. Curious and intrigued, he accosted her and asked her why with her fame as a very talented *vina* player she would demean herself thus. She replied, “If you want to know where I go, you could follow me tonight; but there is one condition. It is that you stay out of sight and never open your mouth.” Sinappa agreed to this condition and followed her that night. She went to the Sri Venkateswara temple on Tirumala Hills, sat in front of the closed Sanctum door and started playing the *vina*. Lo and behold, the temple doors opened and Lord Venkateswara, in the form of Young Krishna, appeared and danced to her music beautifully. After a while, Krishna said, that it was His turn to play *vina* and her turn to dance. They exchanged roles and she danced. Suddenly Krishna, intentionally, played ‘*apaswara*’. Immediately, Sinappa jumped up, annoyed and angry and shouted, “Stop it; it is *apaswaram*”. With a smile, Lord Krishna disappeared. Purandari was distraught and extremely sad. She said, “See what you have done. Don’t you remember the condition I laid out before coming here? What is music, after all, except a tool to attain *Bhakti* and be one with God? What is *suswaram* and what is *apaswaram*? One is *Bhakti* that feels oneness and the other is just ego and importance to external things.” Sinappa thus chastised, felt that he should compensate for his mistake, ignorance and foolishness. He sang to Lord Venkateswara, pleading for forgiveness. Moved by his sincere pleading, Lord pardoned him and reappeared before them. As a reminder of his folly and gratitude to Purandari he decided to call himself, from then on, as “*Purandari Dasa* or *Purandara Dasa*.”

Now here is the question. *Which is the true reason for Purandara Dasa’s Mudra?* Is the first story made up, since it is logical or is the second a fiction? If so, does it have any merit or redeeming value? We would like to know what you think.

### References:

1. South Indian Music. Book V. P. Sambamurthy. 2nd edition. The Indian Music Publishing Co. 1963.
2. Purandara Dasa Kirtanas. Dr. Gowri Kuppaswamy and Dr. M. Hariharan. 3rd edition. CBH publication. 1997.
3. Video on Purandara by T. S. Balakrishna Sastrigal. (Copy available, not for sale!).
4. Sri Bhakta Vijayam, Guhapriyai, Little Flower Co. Chennai, 1980

By T. Sarada

(Sarada, a member of the library committee, is a scientist by profession. She is musical enthusiast and loves *carnatic music*.)

*From our virtual correspondent (at Madras Music Academy )*

..The noteworthy feature of **Hyderabad Brothers'** concert was its planning, as the brothers took up a RTP as the main piece, with sufficient time devoted to exploring all aspects of *manodharma*. ..**T N Seshagopalan** has the ability to traverse a wide range with great speed, and is a quite creative musician . However, if *sruti* is mother and *laya* father, then Seshagopalan stands accused of often ignoring the mother, while paying inordinate attention to the other par-

ent. .... **Papanasam Ashok Ramani's** kutcheri was a complete disappointment. No stability in his voice, no gamakam, absolutely harsh. The Academy gave him chance since he is the grandson of Papanasam Sivan.. The **Mandolin**, with **Srinivas's** adaptation of it for Carnatic music, has come to stay, much as the violin did a couple of centuries ago. Belying all skeptics, Srinivas has repeatedly proved his detractors wrong, by his sheer musical genius....

## Discussion on Compositions

**Composition: Sri Tyagaraja's "PARAMATMUDU"**

**Ragam: Vagadheeswari, Talam: Adi**

### Lyric

*Pallavi*

"Paramatmudu velige muchata бага телусукоре"

*Anupallavi*

"Hariyata Harudata Surulata Narulata  
Akilanda kotlata andarilo"

*Caranam*

"Gagananila tejo jala bhu mayamagu  
mriga khaga naga taru kotulalo  
sugunamulo vigunamulo satatamu  
sadhu tyagarajadi asritulalo"

**Word to word translation (not verbatim but the intent of the composer with the best fit)**

*Pallavi*

telusukore: understand, бага: clearly, fully

muchata: the beauty of, (the wonder of)

velige: the living presence of (grace and beauty of the residence of), Paramatmudu: Paramatma, "Brahman"

*Anu Pallavi*

Hariyata: (He is) Hari, Harudata: (He is ) Haran

surulata: all the devas, narulata: all the human beings

akilanda kotlata: many universes, andarilo:(in) all and everything

*Caranam*

gagana: (He is) the sky, akash anila: air, vayu

tejo: fire and light, Agni jala: water, appu

bhu: earth, priti

mayamagu: in the form (of all the above)

mriga: all animals, khaga: all birds, naga: all mountains,

taru: all trees, kotulalo: in all the infinite forms (of creation),

sugunamulo:in good qualities, vigunamulo:in bad qualities,

sadhu Tyagarajadi: From the bhakta tyagaraja

asritulalo: to all His followers, satatamu: always (resides in them)

**Gist:**

Paramatma is Siva and Vishnu, the five elements that make up the universe, all devas and humans, all living and nonliving objects, goodness and badness. Paramatma always resides in His followers like Tyagaraja; all of you, understand clearly, this great wonder!

### **Paramatmudu, a commentary**

Tyagaraja is unique in the sense he straddled two different worlds in everything he did. His lyrics were composed in "Kavya" Telugu (highly influenced by Sanskrit) as well as "Vaduka" Telugu, (the spoken language) with equal felicity. He sang of personalized God and impersonal God, with equal depth of feeling. He

composed "Kirtanas" that did not require great musical skills for rendering but stressed on Bhakti Rasa only. He also wrote great "Kritis" with all the trimmings and with scope for great elaborations, with importance to raga bhava and intricate tala structure. Most of his compositions were spontaneous. Whatever suited his mood and wish at a given moment was expressed in his compositions. We do not know, unfortunately, the stories behind most of the songs and what little is available changes from source to source. In "Paramatmudu", we do not know what made Tyagaraja choose spoken Telugu, instead of Kavya Telegu and why for such high philosophy he chose to write a Kirtana and why in reality he did not spell out the name of his "Ishta daivam" (Rama).

To Tyagaraja, Rama is everything and in his songs, Rama is portrayed as the Incarnation of Vishnu, the son of Dasarata, husband of Sita. He is also the Trimurtis and the list goes on. In the caranam of "Evarani" (in the raga Devamrutavarshini), Tyagaraja says that Rama is the essence and active principle of Siva and Vishnu, just as the derivation of the name clearly shows. In "Nijamarmamulu" (Umabharanam), he describes Rama as the creator of the great and the small divine manifestations, the Vedas, Sastras, Puranas and their followers etc.

Going to the next level of the Vedic principle, Tyagaraja in his song, "Tatvamerauga", in Garudawani raga claims that Rama becomes the ultimate, "Tat tvam asi", (thou art that). So even if Tyagaraja does not spell out it is obvious that his Paramatmudu, is Rama shining in everything in all glory wonder and splendor. One can see that Tyagaraja does not make the Paramatma a distant, unapproachable figure but uses a Vaduka Telegu expression of closeness and familiarity; the Parabrahmam becomes Paramatmudu. The entire anupallavi continues with that informal tone, with the rhythmic and repetitive "ata", loosely translated as "as", "thus", "so there". In caranam he switches to more staid Sanskrit laden Kavya Telugu to convey the grandeur and wonder of the whole phenomenon of omnipresence. Just in seven short lines Tyagaraja could convey that his Rama is Paramatmudu, approachable, close, but so omniscient and omnipresent. It is interesting to notice his choice of the word, "muchata", in pallavi where the whole concept inspires him. The word does not just translate as wonder, grandeur or beauty but has an endearing aspect of interest or desire, even love; an expression one would use with a near and dear to express personal admiration or happiness. Another idea he talks of in this song is that not only good things but bad things are also manifestations of God, thereby suggesting the all inclusiveness of Paramatmudu (Brahman), and nothing is outside of IT. The same concept is of course, in Gita and in some of his other songs.

In summary, this is a true "Kirtana" and not a "kriti"; it needs to be sung as such without too many distracting embel-

lishments, not spending too much of time on form, not fast paced, but with Bhavam, appreciating just the wonderful words, their meaning and the closeness felt and conveyed by Sri Tyagaraja. In short, the highest philosophical thought of the Vedic religion becomes close to all of us, as spoken by Sri Tyagaraja.

NOTE: Lyric is in conventional English transcribing from Devanagiri script. Some differences in the wordings are inevitable since different publications and language editions tend to use slightly varying texts.

References:

1. Tyagaraja Ganamritam, by S. K. Sitadevi Chellam Iyer. Editor. A. S. Panchapakesa Iyer. Ganamruta Publication. Chennai. 1971
2. Sri Tyagaraja Kirtanas. Translation by T. S. Parthasarathy. 3rd edition. 1976. Higginbottoms Ltd. Madras
3. The spiritual Heritage of Sri Tyagaraja. Text by C. Ramanujachari and Dr. V. Raghavan. 2nd edition 1966. Sri Ramakrishna Mutt, Madras.
4. South Indian Music, Book III. P. Sambamurthy. The Indian Music Publishing House. 1983

*By T. Sarada*

## Obituary

**Dr. C.P. Ramaswamy**, one of the founding members of SRUTI, passed away due to heart attack on January 11, 2002. He was 77. He is survived by his son Pramath and daughter Lavanya, and two grand children. A connoisseur of Carnatic and Hindusthani music, Dr. Ramaswamy was a strong supporter of SRUTI and often traveled all the way from Florida (where he lived during the mid 1990's) to attend Sruti programs.

Born in the state of Karnataka, Dr. Ramaswamy had his higher education in Bangalore and a distinguished career as a chemist in India and US, where he immigrated during the sixties. He had numerous patents and publications to his credit. After retiring in 1997, he moved to Bartonsville, PA, close to the Sringeri Sadhana Center in Stroudsburg where he was actively involved as a volunteer, building a library of books on music, religion and philosophy. A deeply spiritual and religious man, he was highly knowledgeable in all these fields. With a generous, gentle and unassuming personality, he was loved and admired by everyone who knew him. We will miss him very much.



### Dr. C.P. Ramaswamy - A Personal Homage

Remember the gentleman who used to sit in the front row during Sruti's Tyagaraja Aradhana, wearing a dark gray herringbone sports jacket and black rimmed glasses, with a book of Tyagaraja krithis in his hands, carefully observing and absorbing all that was happening on the stage, and exchanging occasional remarks with his neighbors? Unfortunately, you won't see him anymore... That was Dr. C.P. Ramaswamy who passed away last month. In his passing, Sruti has lost one of its founding members and an ardent supporter.

I don't recall when exactly I met him. It is not just my lapse of memory, I suppose; that was the kind of man he was. There was a certain old-world quality about him that made you feel you had known him for a long time. He knew my father Sri H. Yoganarasimham of Mysore, a disciple of Sri Vasudevacharya and a vaggeyakara himself, and had great respect for him. He always used to remember an article my father had written on Sri Vasudevacharya for The Hindu. When my father-in-law, Sri L. Gundappa, a noted Kannada and Tamil scholar, visited us here, Dr. Ramaswamy had invited him to his home and received him with great respect.

When Sruti was founded in 1986, Dr. Ramaswamy and I worked closely together on the Bylaws Committee. We got to know each other quite well as we met a number of times during the preparation of the constitution.

Subsequently, he moved to Florida. While there, he suffered a great loss in his wife's passing. He continued to work there for some more time and after retirement moved back to this area, settling in Bartonsville, near Sringeri Sharada Pitham to which he devoted his time and energies generously. He was building up a good library for the Pitham, I am told.

Dr. Ramaswamy visited us a few times and stayed overnight on a couple of occasions. It was always a pleasure to have him with us. During one such visit, I had mentioned that we needed to purchase a good set of Valmiki Ramayana with the original text in Devanagari and the meaning and commentary in Kannada. The next time he went to Bangalore, he ordered a set for us as a present. My wife and I have cherished it as one of the most precious gifts we ever received. The last time he was with us was in last November. I had arranged a lecture on Bhavabhuti's "*Uttararamacharita*" by a visiting Indian scholar and invited Dr. Ramaswamy to attend it. He got quite excited and immediately accepted to come. Unfortunately, on the day of the lecture, he took ill while driving and had to be admitted to a hospital near my house. Later when I went to see him in the hospital, he seemed quite calm and composed as usual, although a bit weak. After his discharge from the hospital, I brought him home and kept him with us for a day.

The time he spent with us was very good indeed. He reminisced about his working days in India. He recalled with pleasure and feeling the great Kannada short stories of Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, whom he considered on par with the best writers of the world. When we inquired about his health, he didn't wish to dwell on it much but said, in his characteristic way, "*Well, the machinery is getting old.*" Little did we realize that the end would come so soon after.

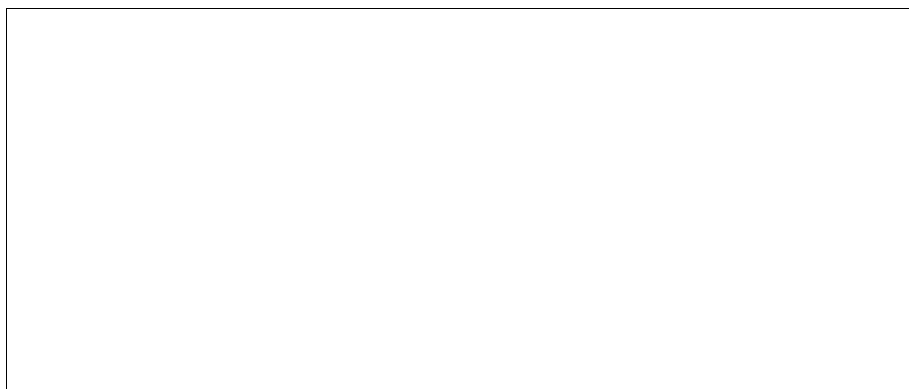
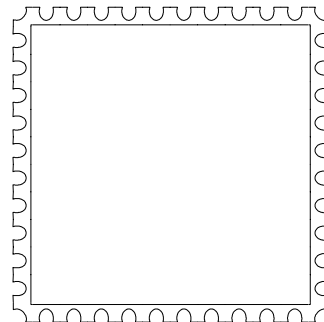
Dr. Ramaswamy will live in our hearts as a man of great culture and learning, gentle and generous. He valued learning above all things in life. He read extensively. At his home in Bartonsville, I found books and magazines on science, Indian and western philosophy, literature (Kannada, Sanskrit and English) and music. He was a scientist of repute and a great humanist. He never showed off his learning or spoke with vehemence but only gently reminded you of the higher aspects of the subject on hand. He made few demands, and was appreciative of every small courtesy shown to him. At his funeral I said to a lady that Dr. Ramaswamy was like a surrogate elder brother we all need and she said he was like a surrogate father to her. We will miss him greatly.

*H.Y. Rajagopal*



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