

The Contribution of Sangeetha Kalanidhi M.L.Vasantha Kumari in Carnatic Music

G.B.V. Anuradha
Research Scholar
Department of Music
SNDT Women's University, Pune
Email: gbvanuradha@gmail.com

Abstract

After the male trinity's contribution for Carnatic music in 18th century, D.K. Pattamal, M.L.Vasanthakumari and M.S. Subbulakshmi, popularly known as female trinity rendered extensively for the propagation of Carnatic music in the 20th century. Amongst the three, the contribution of M.L. Vasnthakumari known as adept manipulator and inventor contributed too extensively for the promotion of Carnatic music in the contemporary era. This paper makes a subtle attempt to examine the contribution of the great artists MLV for Carnatic music in the contemporary era.

Key Words: MLV; Carnatic; Hindustani; Female Trinity

Introduction

The bifurcation of Indian music into South Indian and North Indian, viz., Carnatic and Hindustani after 12th century, led for lot of changes and developments in its own way by each branch. However, until modern times, the musical contribution and its development was mostly dominated by men compared to women. In the contemporary era, many women singers' in both the fields made significant contributions for the development of their chosen field along with male artists.

In Carntiac music, after the great contributions of the trinity in 18th century, in the 20th century three female singers, namely, D.K. Pattamal, M.L. Vasntha Kumari and M.S. Subbulakshmi made significant contribution in a many ways and means. Being the youngest of the three, M.L. Vasntha kumari popularised a number of unfamiliar ragas and a highly adept manipulator of scales and inventor of variations of ragas, occupied a special place in the annals of Indian musicology. The rich contributions of hers earned a number of titles and left an undeniable stamp of MLV bani in the world of music. This paper examines the contribution of the rare features that earned a mark of respect for the great voice of womanhood.

Formative Years:

Madras Lalitangi Vasanthakumari, popularly referred to as MLV, was born on July 3, 1928 in a musical family. Her father Koothanur Ayyasami Iyer and his second wife Lalithangi both were musicians. Vasanthakumari was a child prodigy, whose precocity her parents chose not to exploit for publicity or money, instead wanted her to study and become a doctor. She learnt music from Coimbatore Thayi, Flute Subba Rao and Veena Dhanammal. She used to accompany her mother and to observe the style and presentation of ragas. During her 13th year in 1941 she was unexpectedly gave a solo performance in Bangalore when her mother suddenly fell ill. However, her parents never thought to make her a musician.

It was a coincidence that one day, the great legendary of Carnatic music G.N. Balasubramaniam (GNB) happened to listen to MLV and then insisted that she should contribute to music and took her as his first disciple. The painstaking efforts of inculcation of *manodharam* to MLV have yielded fruits in later years to discharge the obligation that she agreed to render to her guru is propagation of Carnatic music in its vivid style and presentation. The rarity of MLV was that she used to learn Hindustani out of interest and regularly visited a number of scholars of both streams of music. She grew up in a splendid atmosphere of music.

The Musical Style of the Genius

Being a student of GNB, she was never emotional in her style or presentation. The in-depth knowledge in *manodharama* like her guru, her rendition of *alapana* used to be gradual and systematic. She was an instantaneous singer than depending on *sadhana* before a programme. The extensive knowledge of *manodharma* and a comparative idea of Hindustani led her to render difficult ragas in her own style with *alapana* and *kalpana swaras* suitably presented with *shruti-bheda*. She used to be gracefully adjusting the pitch while shifting from one raga to another during the course of singing compositions of great musicians. To illustrate her creativity, the elegant shifting she used to do in the ragas of Shanmukhapriya-Sankarabharanam, Bhairavi-Kamas, Abhogi-Valaji without any strain or great effort. The rendition style of Hamsadhvani raga of hers became popular and then introduced by a number of musicians in Hindustani music.

The versatile rendition of music by her led to enter into play back singing in 1946 and she never looked back after 1951. She sung a number of songs in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi filmdom. Impressed by her repository of knowledge in both the main streams of Indian music Raj Kapoor introduced her to Hindi film world with a *tillana*. Even in movies, she used to mix the Carnatic ragas with ease.

The rich repository of composition of Purandaradasa by her mother had been transferred to MLV for Propagation. She popularized the Devaranamas (keertans) of Purandaradasa in Kannada. She popularized the writings of Narayana theertha, especially Kalyana Gopalam in

Sindhubharavi. In this same tune, she rendered the kritis of Purandaradasa. Her acquaintances with Bade Gulam Ali Khan lead her to learn the nuances of Sindhubharavi in Hindustani style. The popularization of Purandaradasa compositions earned her the Doctorate degree from the University of Mysore in 1976. She also received the Padma Bhusan from the Government of India. At the age of 49, in 1977 she received the award Sangita Kalanidhi from the Madras Music Academy for her extensive knowledge in Carnatic Music.

The great singer of contemporary Carnatic Music Sudha Raghunathan was her pet disciple. The famous actor of South Indian movies Srividaya was her daughter. As a genius in music, she used to be humanist and humble and rendered her skills to a number of people. At the age of 63 in 1990, the music world lost a gem of music and the vacuum created by her demise cannot be filled easily.

Conclusion:

She was a trailblazer and trendsetter. There is no doubt that initials of MLV, often described as Melody, Laya and Vidwat stands as an acronym to the versatility to the great artist of yester years. The dedication and her commitment for propagation of intellectual repository of music in her own *bani* lead her par in excellence amongst other great singers like D.K. Pattamal and M.S. Subbulakshmi. Her voice used to be as beautiful as of hers and the mesmerizing scholastic presentational skills lead to evolution of female trinity in Carnatic music along with the above two great artists. The real tribute to such a great artist of women hood is only to strive to expand the sublime beauty of both streams of Indian Music. In the longer run such impartation could bring rejoice to synchronize the differences that exist between the main schools of Indian music as presented by MLV by employing her path breaking presentational skills of musicology.

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