

## **Evolution of Carnatic music- a series**

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few columns, we have looked at the contribution of women to the ever evolving field of Carnatic music. Women started off as mainly composers and then with the passage of time, rose to become prominent performers. This month, we look at the last of the trinity of female performers- Smt. D. K. Pattammal.

Smt. Damal Krishnaswamy Pattammal (1919-2009) was born into an orthodox Brahmin family. Her father, a music enthusiast, inspired her to learn music. Her mother, despite being a talented singer, was not allowed to perform in public; in fact, even singing for family and relatives was not permitted in keeping with the orthodox tradition that Brahmin women were not allowed to perform on stage. As a child, Pattammal attended numerous concerts and on returning home would notate the *krithis* (musical compositions) that she had heard in the concert. She then trained under many *vidwans* to acquire a rich repertoire of compositions. She was a trailblazer in the field of Carnatic music by being the first Brahmin woman to perform publicly. Pattammal was also the first woman to perform complex concert items such as the *Ragam Tanam Pallavi* in intricate *talas* (rhythmic cycles).

Pattammal was one of the earliest musicians to sing in films. Readers may remember from previous columns that Smt. Pattammal only sang songs in films if they were either devotional or patriotic. Several of her films highlighted India's freedom movement against the British; as a result, they were banned by the British government. Her signature song "Shanti Nilava Vendum" called for world peace reiterating the non-violent ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi. Many people still remember the patriotic songs that she sang over AIR (All India Radio) at the stroke of midnight on August 14, 1947 when India attained freedom from British rule.

Smt. Pattammal, like the other musicians in the trinity of female Carnatic musicians, also received the Sangitha Kalanidhi title (in 1970). Additionally, she received the Padma Vibhushan (India's second highest civilian honor) in 1998.

Till we meet next time, do listen to one of Smt. Pattammal's most popular songs "Theeradha Vilayattu Pillai"- you will be able to find clips of her rendition on the Internet.

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