

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

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, last month we looked at the life of one of Carnatic music's most famous vocalists- Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi. This month, I would like to introduce one more female vocalist who was part of the trinity of female Carnatic vocalists- Smt. M. L. Vasanthakumari (1928-1990).

Madras Lalitangi Vasanthakumari or MLV as she was popularly known was born into a musical family. Both her father and mother were musicians; thus MLV was always in an atmosphere filled with music. She came under the tutelage of famed musician G.N. Balasubramaniam, who after hearing her sing, persuaded her parents to place MLV under his tutelage.

MLV developed a style of singing that was replete with *brighas* (fast phrases). Her pliant voice enabled her to effortlessly travel through different octaves. She could render many difficult ragas with ease. MLV is best known for popularizing Purandara Dasa *devaranamas*. Readers may recall from earlier columns that Purandara Dasa was one of the proponents of the *Bhakti* movement in South India. His compositions which were simple yet meaningful advocated a path of devotion or *bhakti* to the Lord. MLV's mother had a wide repertoire of these *devaranamas* which she handed over to MLV.

Apart from being an exceptional Carnatic musician, MLV was also a playback singer for many movies. For her many contributions to the field of music, MLV was honored with a doctoral degree from Mysore University as well as the Padma Bhushan conferred by the government of India. In 1977, she was the youngest woman to earn the Sangita Kalanidhi, a prestigious title conferred by the Madras Music Academy.

MLV was a generous teacher and trained several students. Her notable students include popular musicians Smt. Sudha Raghunathan, Sri Trichur Ramachandran and Smt. Charumathi Ramachandran among others.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the Purandara Dasa *devaranama* 'Venkatachala Nilayam' by Smt. M.L. Vasanthakumari- you can find her rendition on the Internet.

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