

Carnatic Music- Role in Indian Independence

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, at the time of writing this month's column, India is getting ready to celebrate her 67th Independence Day. In honor of that, let us take a look at Carnatic music and its role in Indian independence.

As readers would have gathered by now, *bhakti* is the predominant theme in Carnatic music; however there were composers such as Subramanya Bharatiyar who championed the cause of patriotism through their compositions. Bharatiyar's compositions emphasized the unity of India and stirred a sense of nationalism in people when he sang his compositions at Congress meetings. His patriotic songs earned him the title of *Desiya Kavi* or National Poet.

One of India's finest female Carnatic musicians Smt. D.K. Pattammal, popularized several patriotic songs of Subramanya Bharatiyar. She was one of the earliest musicians to sing in films but sang only devotional or patriotic compositions. Her signature song "Shanthi Nilava Vendum" called for peace in the world, reiterating Mahatma Gandhi's ideologies. People still remember the Bharatiyar songs that she sang over AIR (All India Radio) at the stroke of midnight on August 14, 1947 when India attained freedom.

Similarly, another of the trinity of female musicians, M.L. Vasanthakumari, rendered "Ellorum Gandhi", a composition that called for people of all faiths to live as one, echoing Gandhi's famous quotation- 'I am a Muslim and a Hindu and a Christian and a Jew and so are all of you'. Of course, the legendary musician M.S. Subbulakshmi's voice rendering Gandhiji's favorite bhajan "Hari Tum Haro" has been immortalized. Gandhiji is said to have preferred M.S. Subbulakshmi "say" the composition than have anybody else sing it!

Today, it is quite common to have Carnatic music concerts on August 15th- the Indian Independence Day. Most musicians will include patriotic compositions towards the end of the concert. Till we meet next time, do listen to the Carnatic rendition of the patriotic composition "Vande Mataram", normally sung in the *raga* Desh- you can easily find renditions on the Internet.

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