



Date:15/09/2006 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/fr/2006/09/15/stories/2006091500320300.htm>

[Back](#) [Friday Review](#) [Bangalore](#) [Chennai and Tamil Nadu](#) [Delhi](#) [Hyderabad](#) [Thiruvananthapuram](#)

They shared a special bond

SULOCHANA PATTABHIRAMAN

Taking care of M.S. and Sadasivam was the top priority for K.R.Athmanathan, who shares his thoughts on the occasion of M.S.'s 90th birth anniversary tomorrow.



PICTURE OF HARMONY: M. S. Subbulakshmi and T. Sadasivam.

While remembering the couple extraordinaire, M.S.Subbulakshmi and her husband T. Sadasivam, one other name apart from the

immediate members of the family that has a striking impact is that of K.R.Athmanathan. He belongs to a musical lineage, being the younger sibling of reputed vidwans, K.R.Kumaraswami Iyer and K.R.Kedaranathan.

Athmanathan joined *Kalki* in 1954 and from then onwards till M.S.'s passing away in December 2004, he was a great source of moral support and mental strength to the entire Sadasivam household in general, and M.S. in particular.

The son of K. Ranganatha Iyer and Lakshmi Ammal, dedicated care of M.S. and Sadasivam became the top priority in his life. This scribe remembers Sadasivam's affectionate remarks on the 80th birthday of M.S., "To others, he is Athmanathan, to me he is my Athma."

On the occasion of Subbulakshmi's 90th birthday that falls on September 16, Athmanathan was pleased to share some of his experiences and endearing tidbits during his long association with the undisputed queen of Indian melody and her illustrious husband.

Piping hot coffee

Amma and Mama, as Athmanathan affectionately refers to them, as a matter of principle and practice rose very early, even before 5 a.m., and began the day with a cup of piping hot coffee. While Mama liked it strong and sweet, Amma preferred it light and mild, with just a trace of sugar because of her diabetes. Then for a brisk walk in the garden that had to be stopped at a point of time when Amma had a fall and broke her thighbone.

The Sukku coffee, incidentally, became a favourite beverage with both M.S and Sadasivam sometimes even preferred to the filter coffee and was offered to visitors. It had a special flavour and was rather different from what is normally available in the Khadi Bhavan and other places because of the addition of coriander seeds and also jaggery syrup instead of refined sugar.

Amma was a lady of very simple habits, ostentation was one word which you would not find in her lexicon. She would prefer to use green gram powder to wash her hands instead of perfumed liquid soap.

Amma's puja with the chanting of slokas and japam and writing 'Rama' nama would take an hour every morning, and then the concentrated assiduous music practice with the sruti box would take over. Percentage sruti alignment was an article of faith with Amma. She was not very well disposed to the electronic tambura, which she was convinced could not stand up to the melodic challenge of the manual tambura that produced 'apoorva nada.' She was highly appreciative of the young generation's performing talent and skills and made it a point to compliment and congratulate them on their TV or radio performances.

Mama and Amma used to rest for a while after a simple but tasty lunch. Mama enjoyed mostly traditional South Indian cooking without spices and also liked chappati and dhal. *Pooshanikkai Pulippukkoottu* (white pumpkin) with a sharp tang of tamarind and red chilli, vadai and murukku not very deeply fried, were some of Amma's favourites.

Then followed Mama's cards session with Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, while Amma would start practice for an hour or so again

with Radha, Vijaya, Gowri, Sriramkumar (on the violin) and Kadayanallur Venkataraman whose unparalleled music has made many songs in M.S.'s repertoire attain immortal stature.

Before each concert, Mama and Amma would discuss the agenda of the programme and invariably Amma would abide by the selection of songs suggested by Mama, who with his incredible musical acuity knew exactly what to present on every occasion. In Amma's illustrious career, there was no question of a kutcheri being a flop. She had the habit of jotting down even minute details about her performances such as the organisers, venue, accompanists, the song list, the names of dignitaries who attended the programme and even the colours of the saris that she wore. However tired she was, she would put away her jewels, after cleaning them, in their proper places.

Amma's sartorial elegance was perhaps an extension of her art — dignified, decorous, tasteful and unpretentious. The deep yellow sari with a green border that she would wear sometimes during puja would give her a divine appearance. Parrot green and red were colours that she liked and she was very fond of wearing red and green glass bangles.

Amma's two dear friends with whom she shared her thoughts and confidences were Mangalam Ramamurthi, Mama's niece, and Chinnani Mami, wife of art critic K.S.Mahadevan who passed away recently.

The bond between Amma and Mama was something very special. They often sat together conversing and laughing at a shared joke. To Amma, Mama's words were gospel, his wish was her command. As an artiste she was beyond compare, as a woman she represented the archetypal traditional Indian womanhood.

Musical nuggets



With Athmanathan.

Amma learnt many compositions from great stalwarts such as Papanasam Sivan, T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, Mazhavarayamendal Subbarama Bagavadhar, Musiri and others, belonging to the next generation. She once spoke about the greatness of Sivan to this writer, and said that among all songs in Varali, Sivan's "Ka Vaa Vaa" appealed to her most.

P.S.Srinivasa Rao, a master in the light classical genre, tuned for M.S. some of Indira Devi's Meera bhajans and also some Hindustani songs. "Naanatti Bratuku," an Annamacharya composition, was learnt from Shobha Raju, a young singer of Hyderabad. From violin vidwan Thiruvallangadu Sundaresa Iyer and Harikatha exponent Annaswami Bagavathar, Amma fine-tuned her sloka renderings and also some of the delicate nuances of classical Carnatic music. Ra. Ganapati and R. Veezhinathan helped her in the selection of Sanskrit verses that were included in her concerts and recordings and also ensured perfect diction.

Exclusive for Amma

Very few music lovers are aware that it was popular music director S.V. Venkataraman who set the lilting music for the evergreen "Vadavarayai Mathakki" in Silappadhikaram and Perivazhwar's pasuram, "Mudi Ondri Moovulagilum." The melodic outfit for 'Maithrim Bhajatha,' the lyrics composed by Maha Periyaval, exclusively for Amma on the singular occasion of her United Nations concert, is to the credit of Vasant Desai, the well-known Hindi film music director.

K.S. Raghunathan of HMV played an important role during Amma's recordings. Even during recordings when she was not exposed

to the view of the public, whether it was the Kambaramayanam verses, Balaji Suprabatham in Tamizh or Meenakshi Suprabatham by Dr. V. Raghavan; she never referred to papers or note books containing the lyrics. Today seems to be the laptop age.

Mama would insist that every raga should be elaborated with concentration and its beauty brought to the fore in all the stages of its development.

After the release of Meera, many parents were inspired to name their girl babies Subbulakshmi. One such child is Subhalakshmi, wife of the distinguished sarod player Amjad Ali Khan.

Mouni baba was a saint in Ujjain who had never spoken even a word for many long years. During the visit of Amma and Mama to his ashram after the Kalidas Samman award in Bhopal, Swamiji wrote on a slate complimenting Amma on her magical voice and unqualified art. A poor north Indian villager from the rural areas had come all the way to Bhopal to thank Amma for her Hanuman Chalisa, that helped his daughter get rid of her disease.

© Copyright 2000 - 2009 The Hindu