

## Presidential Speech of Vidushis Smt. C.Saroja and Smt. C.Lalitha

at the 84th Annual Conference and Concerts  
at The Music Academy Madras (15-12-2010)

“Respected Sri Shiv Nadar, the President Sri N.Murali, honourable members of the Executive Committee of The Music Academy, distinguished members of the Advisory Committee of The Music Academy, members of The Music Academy and the rasikas present here.”

This year, The Music Academy is honouring us with the title “Sangeetha Kalanidhi” and has extended to us the privilege of presiding over the 84th Annual Conference of the Academy. This is truly a memorable day in our career as Carnatic classical vocalists and marks another milestone in our musical career. We are indeed very grateful and thankful to the President, Vice-Presidents, Secretaries and the members of the Executive Committee of The Music Academy for having conferred this honour on us.

Since early 1900 The Music Academy has been actively involved in promoting classical art and our association with The Music Academy dates back to 1959, when we first performed as upcoming youngsters. We are indeed proud of the yeoman service rendered by The Music Academy in promoting the rich fine arts of Indian culture. We wish them the very best in all their future endeavours and pray to God Almighty to bless them with the strength and will to continue this unparalleled service to fine arts.

On this happy occasion, we wish to recall with a sense of gratitude some persons who have played a very significant role in our musical career and who have contributed immensely to our success as Carnatic

classical vocalists. As they say commonly “Matha, Pitha, Guru, Deivam”, all of them have played a very significant role in our life and career.

First we would like to pay our obeisance to our matha and pitha, Sri Chidambaram Iyer and Smt. Mukthambal who left no stone unturned to help us achieve success in our chosen career. Although born in Trissur, our childhood and schooling was in Bombay (now known as Mumbai). Our father was an engineer in Western Railways and was an ardent lover of Carnatic classical music. Our parents always dreamt of us establishing ourselves as Carnatic music vocalists. He was very particular that we are given the right kind of training and also ensured that we listened to the music of the stalwarts of yesteryear. Since our father was one of the founding members of Bharatiya Music & Arts Society, we have had the privilege of listening to the concerts of many renowned musicians who performed for Bharatiya Music & Arts Society. Our exposure to the great music of the legends helped us to develop our knowledge of classical music.

As we completed schooling, our parents realised that Chennai is the place that we should be in if we wanted to embark on a professional career as carnatic vocalists. When our father retired from service, our parents relocated to Chennai from Bombay primarily to nurture our talent and to get us the right exposure. Our father was very strict with us when it came to regular rehearsals. He firmly believed that there is no alternative to hard work and hard work means regular sadagam. Even as children

we were woken up early in the morning and made to practice our music lessons. “No coffee or school if there is no morning practice” these were his strict instructions.

Unlike young girls of our generation who often helped their parents in the household chores, our parents never expected us to help out with household chores. Their only desire for us was to practice singing as often as possible. We are deeply indebted and thankful to our parents, for all the hardships that they underwent and their unrelenting perseverance in ensuring that we made a mark for ourselves in this field.

In addition to our parents, we are also deeply indebted and thankful to our respective spouses who have always been very supportive and encouraging in our musical career. Unlike regular housewives who devote much of their time for their family, we have not been able to spend much time with our family. Nevertheless, our respective spouses have never ever complained and have always encouraged us to better our musical career.

Next we wish to acknowledge the gurus under whom we received musical training and without whose blessings, encouragement and support we would not be where we are today. Our introduction to Carnatic music was through our dear sister, Smt. Sethu Mahadevan. Sri H.A.S. Mani, whom we fondly remember as Chellamani Sar was our first teacher in Bombay under whom we started our formal training of Carnatic classical music. He certainly laid a very strong foundation for us in music. As we grew we desired to take advanced training and applied for Government of India cultural scholarship. In 1958 I got the scholarship and that is when we relocated from Bombay to Chennai. Two years later Lalitha also got the same scholarship. We had known of Central College of Music and so we approached the then principal of the College, Sri Musiri Subramanya Iyer. He took us under his wings and we

started our training under the guidance of Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sri Musiri Subramanya Iyer. He also took on the responsibility of teaching us on a one to one basis at his residence in Oliver Road. It was under his guidance that we learnt how to render a kriti, where exactly to put sangathis and how to render nerevals. He always emphasized on sahitya suddham and bhavam in whatever that is rendered. While brigas or sangathis embellish a composition, he always believed that they should not be overdone as “alavukku minjinal amruthamum vishamakum”. Another strength of the Musiri school of music was the swaram singing. He always emphasized that swaram singing should be like ragam singing with the same fluency, ease and coherence. Further he always emphasized that “kelvi gnanam” was an important aspect in learning to master classical music. In fact I was the first to start training under Sri Musiri Subramanya Iyer. However, he used to ask Lalitha also to come and sit in the class and he said that if she listens to what is being taught that itself will help her a lot later. The more you listen to classical music the more your imagination is kindled, leading to creativity.

We learnt under Sri Musiri Subramanya Iyer for two years. Under his personal supervision, he also advised that his disciples Sri T.K. Govinda Rao and Sri Venkatraman would have the shared responsibility of teaching us. It was our good fortune that we were blessed with such an opportunity. During the period of our scholarship, both Sri Govinda Rao and Sri Venkatraman taught us besides Sri Iyerval. After our scholarship term we continued our training under Sangeetha Kalanidhi Sri T.K. Govinda Rao. We are proud and also deeply indebted to God that we are able to continue to learn from our guru Sri Govinda Rao to this day. Sri T.K. Govinda Rao’s relentless passion for music, his

tireless efforts and the utter dedication and sincerity with which he started inculcating the Musiri Bhani in us continues to this day. Once the violin stalwart Sri Lalgudi Jayarama Iyer remarked that we were blessed with a guru who never really worries about “mani” (time) or money. His mode of teaching is particularly designed to suit the vocal range and modulations of the students. He taught us that music should be “janaranjakam” and that even a lay person should be able to enjoy it. Our tonal synchrony is also something that we owe to our guru Sri Govinda Rao who insisted on it. We recollect our Khamas lessons for “brochevarevarura” when he had trained us for days together for getting the tenor absolutely in unison as the ragas and sangathis demand an amalgam we had to follow for a lifetime.

Our guru Sri Govinda Rao being a multilingual person is able to appreciate music in any language. This facet of him also enables him to include subtle nuances in a song which would make the rendering more appealing and pleasing. He would explain the meaning of the “Sahitya” and how it is equally important to express this meaning in music. He would also explain in great length the importance of “Neraval” which brings out the aesthetic and melodious aspect of the “Sahitya” and “Raga”. Once a well wisher of ours suggested that we should seek the help of specialists in each area of Carnatic music such as pallavi, Dikshithar kritis, padams and bhajans to increase our repertoire but the need did not arise as our guru is well versed and knowledgeable in all aspects and areas of music. We have gained enormous musical insight under his guidance.

As the popular saying goes “Kattrathu Kaimanalavu Kallathathu ulakalavu”, music is an ocean and any amount of learning is not enough to master this divine art. The more you learn the more you feel there is to learn. So we continue our

journey of musical learning and discovery to this day and would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our guru.

“Avinashi tu Thadwiddhi yena sarvamidam vyaptham” -vidhi or destiny is imperishable and pervades this universe. No one has the power to destroy this eternal substance. God’s will or destiny has also played a very important part in our lives. We belong to a family of seven brothers and sisters and all of us were musically inclined. However, as destiny would have it our parents chose us to pursue this field as our profession. Similarly, while we were enthusiastic about music and singing and aspired to be performing artists, neither we nor our parents were aware of what needs to be done to project us as performing artists. Again as destiny would have it, we were awarded the Government of India scholarship and we came under the tutelage of Sri Musiri Subramanya Iyer and he took special interest in us and insisted that we also take special coaching from him at his house besides learning at the Central College of Music. This also led us to come in contact with Sri Govinda Rao who has been a great source of inspiration and knowledge for us to date.

Talking of destiny and will of God, people normally wish to begin any endeavour with a good omen. In this regard, we wish to recollect that when we first got an invite for a concert in the All India Radio, we were extremely excited. Right from planning the songs to be sung for the concert, we practiced fervently as we wanted to present our best. We had taken great pains to select the songs to be sung, ensuring that we will be putting our best show. We had also rehearsed for the concert several times so that we are confident while singing which was to be broadcast live, perhaps the first experience for us. With our expectations soaring high and brimming with confidence, we entered All India Radio, when the most unexpected happened. Mr.

A.J. John, the then Governor of Tamil Nadu passed away and official mourning had been declared. In view of this and since our programme was a live broadcast, we were told that we should sing only light classical songs such as bhajans and other bhakthi padalgal. We were also told that we should not sing raga alapanai, swaram and also any fast paced songs because of the mourning that had been declared. We were extremely disappointed and sad. Being up and coming artistes we thought that we had lost a golden opportunity to showcase our talents. We also thought that this does not look like a good omen for the start of our career. Nevertheless, with a heavy heart and typical of disheartened youngsters, we sang the limited repertoire of the bhakthi padalgal that we knew.

Today when we look back and remember that day at the All India Radio, we feel amused because today through these 50 odd years of our singing career, with God's blessings we have sung on several occasions at the All India Radio, including at several special functions and national festivals conducted by the All India Radio and are top graded artistes of the All India Radio. Although we thought our first encounter with the All India Radio was not a good omen, it has not turned out to be so for our career as we have not looked back since then. It is often said "Man proposes and God disposes" and we think this is what happened in our case. When we wanted to perform in grand style we could not and when we thought that this is not a right omen for our career, we were again proved wrong. This has really led us to believe that what one is destined to achieve one will achieve no matter whether the omen is good or bad. Hard work and sincerity to one's profession and unstinted devotion to God is what matters and there is no substitute to this. Purandara Dasa has rightly said "Hari Chiththa Satya Nara Chittakke Bandaddu Lava Lesha Nadeyadu"-everything in this

world happens only because God wills it. Nothing happens just because man wills it.

Carnatic classical music and younger generation have always fascinated us. We believe that there is no dearth for good talent in our country when it comes to classical music. In the olden days budding youngsters did not easily get a platform to showcase their talent. However, in this age, we have plenty of opportunities through sabhas and television for budding artistes to exhibit their talent and reach out to people. We have always believed that budding talent must be given the maximum encouragement and opportunity. This belief was instilled in us by our parents and in whose memory we manage our trust "Mukthambaram Trust" with the sole purpose of providing every opportunity to genuine talent. We understand the anxiety that one feels when one is unable to do what one wants to do because of lack of opportunities. We firmly believe that every effort must be made to provide the best of opportunities to our youth to enable them blossom to their full potential.

Looking at the names of youngsters who are slated to perform in various sabhas this December festival and in many other music festivals, it is indeed very heartening to note that the youngsters of today are taking keen interest in carnatic classical music, in spite of the overwhelming western influence. Further, we are all aware of the rigors of modern day lifestyle and as to how it has become mechanical and monotonous. In such a situation, we are happy that today's youngsters have broken away from such monotony and taken the extra effort to nurture their interest in our traditional art form. We also feel confident and reassured that our traditional music which is an invaluable treasure of our country, will continue to remain vibrant and alive.

At this juncture, we wish to express some of our considered views for the benefit of young and upcoming musicians. You must

aim high and strive your utmost to attain your aim. We wish to reiterate what was taught to us by our gurus, namely, sruthi suddham, kalapramanam, sahyita suddham and bhavam. These are the four pillars of good music. If anyone of these pillars is defective the rendition will be defective. The only way in which one can aim to attain perfection in these four is through regular sadagam or practice. There are no shortcuts to hard work and perseverance.

Technology has greatly helped in making quality music and tutelage available to people far and wide. Cassettes and CDs are now being frequently used by many students and musicians to enhance their knowledge. Furthermore, internet tutelage has greatly helped in long distance learning. In early days gurukulavasam was the norm for any kind of learning be it academics or arts. That slowly changed to attending of regular music classes. Even we have not experienced gurukulavasam. All of our tutelage has been through music lessons learned from our gurus during regular music classes. In the present age, due to

constraints of time and distance more and more people are opting for cassettes, CDs and internet tutelage to enhance their knowledge. While we are greatly appreciative of these innovative teaching and learning methodologies, we believe that there can be no replacement for face to face learning from a guru. It is only when you have a face to face session with a guru that your limitations and mistakes can be pointed out by the guru and the guru can help in rectifying such mistakes. Our suggestion to the youngsters opting for technology as a media of learning is that you should at every opportunity that you get learn from your gurus in face to face sessions. This will certainly improve greatly the quality of your music.

Finally before I conclude we would like to express our thanks to our fans, press and well-wishers. Our achievements and success have been made possible because of their support. Their love and affection have been a source of great encouragement leading us to achieve greater heights in our profession.

Thank you.

Namaskaram

**Bombay Sisters**

**C.Saroja and C.Lalitha**



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