

## 'Maa', Music and I

I cannot say when I met Maa for the first time that I knew her age. She never looked her age. An aura of her rich dreams was hiding her physical appearance. She too seemed not knowing her age. Through friends she had known me before I met her first. When met, she asked, "what about doing *jhalsa*?" It did not strike to me at first what she had meant by *jhalsa*. I had watched *jhalsa ghar*, a film by Satyajith Ray. Then it occurred to me that she might be intending to say something about music because *jhalsa ghar* meant music room. I replied shyly, "later..." She accepted my reply heartily with a gracious smile.

Within a few weeks we grew closer and I began to visit her quite often. She was curious about Karnatic music, and later she expressed her desire to learn music from me. Then Yakoob, her son in law, said, "you are honoured by her discipleship."

I went to her place thrice in a week. She had a strong voice, quite similar to the voice of Gangubai Hangal. Another student, Bindu, a girl of next house too joined. Day by day music sessions grew deeper. Now Gargi, Maa's grand daughter, too joined. In a few months time, Ma made her debut in an informal gathering of her husband's relations. She said she was shy but when they insisted she sang a geetham (varaveena) in the raga *mohanam*. Later, after she studied much, she told me that she wanted to make a duet concert with me. But she was getting too old for that, she seemed not noticing it. As time passed, she became no more than just a sensible listener to music. Before she knew that she cannot sing anymore, she had written a song in Gujarathi that we set into tune and had sung together. Quite sad to say, as her health failed, she could not sing it again even during "Matha to Maa" was being made.

She was very adventurous, and desired to live differently. Unheeding her age, we have traveled together twice to Kottakkal on a motor bike in order to listen to the concerts of Bhimsen Joshi and Amjad Ali Ghan. All through the travel, while I was riding the bike fast, she was singing aloud hither to unheard of gujarathi songs like a mirthful child. Once we went to Trivandrum for participating in the International Film Festival. We were not having delegate passes, so she directly went into the cabin of P. Govindapilla. He greeted her calling "Manda...." They talked a lot about golden old days. He immediately issued passes and dropped us in his car at my sister's home.

Maa watched only a few films. She was more interested in meeting her friends. She was quite at home with my mother, sister and the in-laws of my brother. She even taught them the recipes of a few gujarathi dishes.

Maa had a very aesthetic mind. She preferred music first. Earlier she had a good collection of Western Classical Music which, she said, police had taken away from her mistaking the spools for propaganda materials of revolution. Later she began to collect gems of music again. Among them she listened to Kishori Amonkar most. She liked painting too. Both Johns Mathew and Paul Kallanod had guided her in the world of colours and forms for sometime. And she had made some good paintings too, a few of which were used in "Matha to Maa."

Even during times of ill health, she had not suffered much from loneliness. Dr. M. Radhakrishnan would visit her often. For Maa, talking to him was like opening up a treasure of knowledge and wisdom. She would say when I meet her next that she had a nice talk with Radhakrishnan last time. While saying this, her face will light up with a myriad of emotions.

Maa was always in touch with books. Seena, an educated girl, used to come and read out books of all kinds to Maa in the evening.