

M. S .SUBBULAKSHMI (1916-2004)



Ms. Subbulakshmi was an eminent Carnatic Musician. She was born on September 16, 1916 in Madurai to Shanmukhgavadvu, a veena player, and Subramania Iyer, an advocate. Her brother Saktivel was a mridangam player and accompanied her in concerts. Her sister Vadivambal took after her mother and became a veena player.

She learnt music under Madurai Srinivasa Iyer and Mayavaram V. V. Krishna Iyer. M S recorded her first album for HMV when she was ten. She gave her first concert at Music Academy at age of 13. She made her debut in acting in 1936 with Sevasadan. Three more films followed, of which Meera was the most memorable.

She was married to T. Sadasivam, a senior executive in Ananda Vikatan, a Tamil weekly in 1940.

She has sung Bhajans (hymns) in 10 languages, and enthralled audiences world wide.

M.S raised crores of rupees for charity through her concerts. Her first charity concert was for the Kasturba Memorial Fund in 1944. Institutions that benefited from her philanthropy include the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, the Ramkrishna Math, the Nanak Foundation, the Subramanya Bharati Memorial at Ettayapuram, the Hindu Temple in Flushing, New York, the Kamakshi Temple in Kancheepuram, the Cancer Institute, Voluntary Health Services and the Music Academy at Chennai.

Subbulakshmi was conferred the degree of Doctors of Letters by many Universities, including Sri Venkateswara University (1971), Delhi University (1973) and the University of Madras (1987). The Desihothama (Doctoral Degree) was conferred on her by the Viswa Bhatati University, Shantiniketan.

Ms Subbulakshmi gave the inaugural concert at the Indian Festival, London in 1982, and had also performed in Tokyo, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Malaysia. She introduced Carnatic music to the West at the Edinburgh Festival (1963), and sang at the United Nations (1966) and Carnegie Hall.

In 1968, M.S. became the first woman musician to be honoured with the Sangita Kalanidhi title by the Music Academy, Chennai. M.S. received a large number of awards during her illustrious career spanning more than 50 years. India's top civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, was conferred on her in 1998.

The others honours conferred on M.S. include the Padma Bhushan (1954), Padma Vibhushan (1975), Kalidas Sanman (1988) and the Ramon Magsaysay Award (1974).

Many leaders and political giants of that period, including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajaji, praised her abilities as a vocalist. The then Doordarshan director S.C Garg had told about Ms. Meera Bhajan, "so many other might have sung the bhajan. But it is in her rendering, steeped as they are in bhakti and bhava, that one seems to get to the Creator"

She passed away on 10 December 2004.