

Published: Thursday September 20, 2018

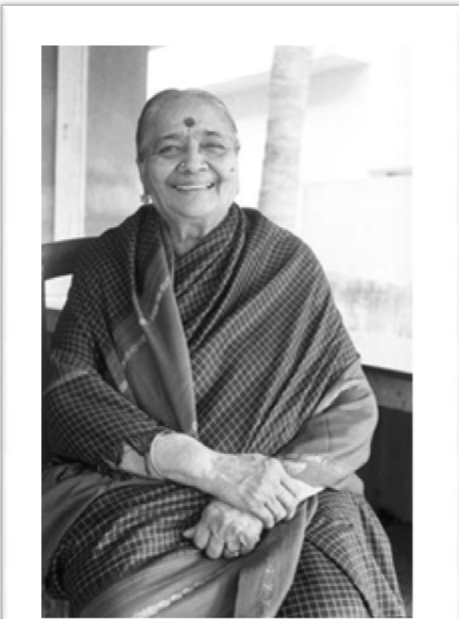
How a child bonded with DKP

T. T. SRINATH

It was an unforgettable evening as the star sang to a select galaxy

Gowri Ramnarayan, writer and curator, sent me an invite to attend on Saturday, September 15, a centenary tribute to the phenomenal and legendary Carnatic musician D.K. Pattammal. While I have very little knowledge of Carnatic music, I have been fortunate to be born and raised in a family that has distinct link with Carnatic music and the invite to attend DKP's centenary tribute revived in me memories of the special bond I shared with her as a child.

My late grandfather T.T. Krishnamachari, who served as the Union Cabinet



▷ K. Pattammal

| Photo Credit: [N SRIDHARAN](#)

Minister for several years during Jawaharlal Nehru's period, was a patron of this art form. He was instrumental in inviting Nehru to lay the foundation stone for the Music Academy, as it stands today at the junction of Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai and TTK Salai. My grandfather was also the vice-president of the Music Academy and following in his footsteps were my uncle T.T. Vasu, who was president of the Academy for many years and my aunt Dr. Malathi Rangaswamy, who was vice-president for an equal length of time. Thus even though I do not command an understanding of Carnatic music, I have been blessed to have sat alongside eminent Carnatic musicians of the past during my childhood.

DKP amma, her husband Iswaran and son Lakshman Kumar often visited my grandfather in Delhi, where he was serving as the Union Finance Minister (1962-65), and stayed with him. In the same period, my parents and I also lived with him. I was therefore able to gain a ringside experience of being among

luminaries who visited and stayed with us. While there were several people from Chennai, Madras then, who visited and stayed with us, DKP amma and Lakshman were two persons with whom I developed an intimate bond and affection.

Whenever DKP amma visited New Delhi to either perform in a public function or for All India Radio, I would not go to school and instead, get into the car and travel with her wherever she went. On one such occasion, she was recording at AIR, and I was perhaps eight years old. As I was a little scared, overwhelmed by the large corridors and silence that prevailed throughout the AIR complex, I insisted on sitting with her in the recording room.

Fortunately it was a recording and not a live performance, so the producer allowed me to sit with her. As the song was coming to an end, I fidgeted and the sound was captured by the microphone. The producer stopped the recording, came into the recording room and scolded me. DKP amma admonished the producer, telling him that I was a child and that she would sing again to correct the disturbance I had caused. She suggested to Lakshman that he take me for a drive, which he did, to Jantar Mantar, and we returned in time to see her complete the recording.

On another occasion, she had completed her recording at AIR well ahead of schedule and returned to our house early that evening. My grandfather had also returned from Parliament session and both DKP amma and he got chatting. In the course of their conversation, she suggested that he could invite a few friends over in the evening and she would sing for the gathering. My grandfather was enthused, and that evening we played host to luminaries who would have rarely come together under normal circumstances.

Rare chamber concert

Among those who came to hear what perhaps was a once-in-a-lifetime chamber concert, included the top echelon of the ICS, namely L.K. Jha, H.V.R. Iyengar, S. Ranganathan, S. Boothalingam, besides Col. Dr. R. D. Iyer, personal surgeon to the then President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, T.S. Krishna of the TVS family, K. Kamaraj, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, who my grandfather always admired for his astuteness, V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar, founder of one of the earliest sugar businesses in Tamil Nadu, Subbiah Chettiar of Anglo French Textiles, Loganatha Mudaliar, co-founder of Tarapore and Company, S.R. Subramaniam, scion of the Royal Enfield family, Ramnath Goenka, founder of *The Indian Express* group of newspapers, Mr. K. Ramaswamy, Senior

Correspondent of *The Hindu* in New Delhi, Mahavir Tyagi, Union Minister for Rehabilitation, Baliram Bhagat, also a Union Minister and the then External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh.

My mother, Susheela Raghavan, who was the official hostess for my grandfather, as my grandmother had passed on many years ago, ensured that the guests were served South Indian filter coffee and savouries that go with it. All this was done in a rush, and yet, the evening turned out delectable, with DKP amma singing uninterrupted, with no accompaniment, save her tambura, for almost two hours. I do not know if such an informal and impromptu gathering of those who oversaw the destiny of India may happen again.

As I remember the occasion, I recall a similar, rare coming together of four eminent singers namely Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash, on December 4, 1956, at the Sun Record Studios in Memphis, Tennessee. Such a coming together of competing and world class artistes has never happened thereafter and has now come to be known as the ‘Million Dollar Quartet.’

In December 1965, shortly before my grandfather resigned from the Union Cabinet, my parents and I relocated to Chennai. I pestered my mother for a dog and she rang DKP amma, who then lived with her family in Srinagar Colony, Saidapet, Chennai. DKP amma told my mother to bring me over to her house and she gifted me a Pomeranian pup, which my mother named ‘Gigi’ after the successful American musical-romance of the late 1950s. My mother’s logic was that since DKP amma, a singer of eminence gifted me the pup, she should be given a ‘musical name.’

I lost touch with DKP amma after this, though I would meet Mr. Iswaran off and on, when he would visit my uncle Vasu to join him for a game of tennis.

In 1997, my daughter Krithika, who was training under the prominent Bharatanatyam dancer Meenakshi Chitharanjan, was performing her arangetram. I wanted DKP amma to be there to bless her. I visited her house in Kotturpuram. She was finding it difficult to walk because of pain in her knees, yet she got up to embrace me and said she would definitely come, and she did.

Gowri Ramnarayan’s invite stirred in me long-buried memories. It reinforced a deep desire to hold on to those little incidents in the past that brought me joy. Oscar Wilde said, ‘Memory... is the diary that we all carry about with us’.

Finally, one of the other compelling reasons for me to attend the centenary celebration was the mention of the notable Carnatic singer Vijay Siva, as the artiste of the evening. My mother, who was the Directress of Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan School, Tirumalai Pillai Road, T. Nagar, when Vijay Siva was admitted into the LKG has a special fondness for him, and he for her. Even as a little child he was able to identify ragas — ‘a child prodigy,’ my mother often said. In 1971, when he was in UKG, at the height of the Indo-Pakistan war, Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy, Director of the Padma Seshadri Schools, had organised a function in which an artiste was rendering Carnatic compositions. Vijay Siva being a prodigy was also invited on stage to sing. My mother still carries memories of that event.

DKP amma will always remain in my memory as one who could absorb public adulation without being consumed by it and have a deep affection for a child like me, who was drawn to her because of the warmth and love she showered.

(The writer is an organisational and behavioural consultant. He can be contacted at ttsrinath@gmail.com)