

M S Subbalakshmi

(“Tribute to MS Subbulakshmi” for All India Radio on 12.12.2004)

Madurai Shanmukavadivu Subbulakshmi, the incomparable gem of Music was no ordinary person; she was a phenomenon of the 20th Century. Her voice thrilled the greater of this globe, regardless of the language in which she sang. Her performance before the audience in United Nations consisting of African, Americans, Arabs, Asians, Austrians, Europeans and Latin Americans was so much appreciated that there was standing ovation for full ten minutes. There are very few capitals in the world where she had not rendered her delectable music during India festivals abroad and otherwise music is not merely an entertainment. It has been from time immemorial the vehicle of Bhakti. Alvars and Nayanmars sang in praise of Gods in delicious compositions and imparted devotion to God among the people. Tyagaraja of Tamil Nadu, Narayan Bhattadri of Kerala, Purandara Dasa of Karnataka, Thukaram of Maharashtra, Meera of Rajasthan and Gujarat, Guru Nanak of Punjab, Tulsidas and Kabir of North India, Mahaprush Sankara Deva of Assam, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal and Orissa, Annamacharya of Andhra are but a few of the saints and sages who had kindled the soul of man to follow the Bhakti Marga. MS when acted the part of Meera in the film did transform herself into the original Meera and reflected her Bhakti towards Lord Krishna. Many had noticed that when she sings devotional songs, her eyes are closed and do not see the audience. Instead, she mentally sees those divine beings.

MS was a great devotee of the Pramachariar of Kanchi and never failed to perform in his presence during the Sivaratri celebrations every year and the Paramachariar would go into trance as it were assimilating the divine music.

MS studied the meanings of songs in different languages and also the philosophy behind the Bhajans so that her personality merged with the spirit of those pieces. Full credit should go to her husband, he a connoisseur of music for the selection of appropriate pieces for each occasion.

MS earned how much, she did not know. Most of them went to religious, social and charitable causes. In 1980, Indira Gandhi once wanted to nominate MS to the Rajya Sabha. She was under the impression that MS would be floating in wealth. She was surprised to learn that all of them had to be given away to charities. She asked me to sound MS on the suggestion. I consulted Sadasivam and MS. The model of modesty MS declined, saying that she was not cut out for political work. Comment is needless.

The voice which thrilled the world has been stilled by the inexorable law of life. But her legend will last as long as Mountains stand and Rivers flow in this universe.