

S. RUGMINI GOPALAKRISHNAN

Strings spread serenity

C. Ramakrishnan

When we delve into the history of music, we can find several musicians across generations who have been leading a solitary life in their native land, devoting their time to teaching and accepting the rare concert opportunities that come their way. They do not chase fame, money or concert opportunities but lead a life of contentment. Their devotion to the art and the commitment to pass on their knowledge to the next generation is worth emulating. One such vidushi is vainika Rugmini Gopalakrishnan, who has been spreading music in Tiruvananthapuram for seven decades now.

Rugmini was born on 24 August 1936, as the second of four children, to P.V. Sreenivasa Iyer and Lakshmi Ammal in Tirunelveli district. Losing her father at the tender age of two, she was raised by her grandparents. Twelve-year old Rugmini came to Tiruvananthapuram under the care of her maternal grandfather Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar and uncle Nellai Krishnamurthy. Her elder sister was married to Nellai Krishnamurthy who was a professor at the Swati Tirunal Academy. Rugmini was indeed fortunate to learn the rudiments of Carnatic music from the doyen Muthiah Bhagavatar, who foresaw the potential of a musician in her. As a child, she was naturally attracted to Carnatic music as she was constantly exposed to the music classes conducted by her uncle and the



and Purandaradasa, from these legends in their original pathantarams.

Musiri Subramania Iyer, who came as examiner for the second year public examinations, was so impressed after hearing Rugmini play the Kambhoji geetam on the veena, that he recommended she be promoted directly to the fifth

musical discussions in the house of her grandfather. She joined the Swati Tirunal Music Academy (later named the Swati Tirunal College of Music) when she was thirteen, to pursue the Ganabhooshanam (vocal) course with veena as an allied subject. She was fortunate to be under the tutelage of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, K.R. Kumaraswamy Iyer for vocal and K.S. Naryanaswamy, K.K. Sivaraman for veena. She learnt several compositions of the music trinity, Gopalakrishna Bharati, Papanasam Sivan, Swati Tirunal, Arunagirinathar

year! That was a turning point in her life—to become a vainika. She passed Ganabhooshanam in veena with a first class.

Rugmini attributes her success to her gurus and the hard work she has put in over the years. She is extremely vocal on the importance of guru bhakti. As a little girl, Rugmini would get up at 3 am and begin her practice, which she would do for at least twelve hours a day! She continues to practise for long hours even today. Rugmini participated in the All India Radio veena competition in 1954 and received the first prize from the first President of India, Rajendra Prasad. Her first formal concert was arranged by the Malayali Samajam, New Delhi, and she further presented three concerts in Delhi including one before the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Rugmini was awarded the Government of India Cultural Scholarship and received advanced training from K.S. Narayanaswamy, the doyen of the Travancore bani of veena playing.

Young Rugmini receiving the prize from President Rajendra Prasad

