

Padma Narayanaswamy

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Padma Narayanaswamy, wife of Sangeeta Kalanidhi K.V. Narayanaswamy (KVN) is a distinguished Carnatic musician. She turned 80 in April this year. While much of her life was devoted to her late husband KVN, and she has remained in the background, her musical achievements and contributions as a guru are mostly unknown. Rasikas of today are unaware of musicians who are not on digital platforms and hardly have an opportunity to know about musicians like Padma Narayanaswamy.

Born on 7 April 1942 in Chennai, to Kanakavalli and Narasimhachar, Padma grew up in Secunderabad where Narasimhachar worked for the Nizam Railways. One of ten siblings, Padma was passionate about music from her childhood and was also encouraged by her parents. Her gurus at Secunderabad were Balasubramanyam and T.G. Padmanabhan. Having heard Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and K.V. Narayanaswamy perform at Secunderabad, Narasimhachar decided to put his daughter under the tutelage of KVN. At the age of about 16, Padma shifted to her grandmother Mangamma's home in Thodur village near Chennai, to pursue music full time. Padma recalls the sweet music that Mangamma sang every morning as a prayer to Lord Ranganatha in the raga Bauli.

Padma learnt from KVN for two years.

In 1962, when KVN was appointed as a lecturer at the Chennai Central Music College, he advised Padma to join the college. She then enrolled for the two-year Sangeeta Vidwan course.

In college, Padma had the opportunity to learn from great masters such as Musiri Subramania Iyer (he was the principal), K.V. Narayanaswamy,



S. Ramanathan, T. Brinda and T.M. Thiagarajan. After completing the course, she continued to learn from Musiri for four years under a Government of India scholarship. Mani Krishnaswami, Suguna Varadachari and Suguna Purushothaman were her batch mates. In 1965, she married KVN and also became his lifelong

student, companion and partner in his journey of music.

Padma's musical journey has been one of intense struggle and fierce determination; a single-minded focus on music. She recalls the initial days in Chennai when she had to walk a long way across the paddy fields in Thodur village from her grandmother's home to reach the local railway station, then take a train to Chennai and then again take a bus to KVN's home at Royapettah for music classes. When Padma joined the college, her elder sister Neela, a scientist at BARC Mumbai, took the initiative to move Padma into a room in Mylapore, making it easy for her to commute.

Padma's learning in Chennai, first with KVN, next at the college and later with Musiri was not without challenges. The teachers set high standards and the students had to work hard. The new environment, the new musical standards, the strain involved in commuting—all took a toll on her, but she worked hard and never gave up. Padma recalls the support and encouragement she received from her father Narasimhachar and

her sister Neela at critical moments when she felt a lack of motivation. She continued to learn from KVN after their marriage. Listening to KVN teach and perform played a large role in learning as well. Years of relentless focus resulted in Padma blossoming into a fine musician, with good command on all aspects of music.