



Sharing some reminiscences about my tutelage with Brindamma:

I first met Brindamma in May 1973, a month before my wedding and started regular classes with her.

I was a student of Shri Bombay Ramachandran who did his Sangeetha Vidwan Course in Central College of Carnatic Music in Chennai where Brindamma was a Professor.

He was a big admirer of Brindamma and used to tell me "You must listen to her sublime music". In fact, Shri Bombay Ramachandran, who was an expert in notation, would listen to Brindamma's renditions during her frequent visits to Bombay, make very precise notations and teach the compositions to all his students. Thus, I was already learning the patanthara of Brindamma long before I actually met her.

When I married Raja at the age of eighteen, I was extremely fortunate to go into a household brimming with music. Brindamma was a regular visitor in my in laws' home--"Chhaya"---in Matunga, Bombay and music always pervaded the atmosphere.

My musician mother-in-law Smt Rajalakshmi Sethuraman organised weekly bhajans at home and devotional fervour reigned in the house. Brindamma would invariably spend the months of May and June in Bombay and the master classes that she conducted gave us the opportunity to learn a huge number of compositions---rare krithis of the Trinity, padams and javalis. My husband's sister Aruna Sairam, Alamelu Mani, Kalyani Sharma, Padma Swaminathan, myself and many others formed the group of students who learnt from Brindamma.

As a teacher, Brindamma was uncompromising in her standards and expected us to grasp the nuances of what she taught, work hard at home and sing the composition properly in the next class. If we reproduced the lesson as taught, it elicited a nod of approval and appreciation from her and that would be the ultimate reward for us.

She shared gems from her repertoire like Marakata mani varna (Varali), Buddhiradu--(Shankarabharanam), Neelayatakshi (Paras), Brovavamma (Manji), Sri Kamakshi (Vasantha) and so many padams and javalis.

In addition, I learnt also from listening repeatedly to her concert recordings and live programmes.

I never saw her lose her temper or raise her voice even once --she was indeed a very kind and considerate teacher.

When she was in the mood, she would ask me to bring my veena and play on it for some time.

Visitors would stream in to see her and after they left, she would sometimes comment tongue in cheek and humorously about them and entertain us.

She had utmost conviction in what she sang and adhered to her values and ideas of classicism without making any concessions to popular demands.

I now recount some incidents that come to my mind:

During the oonjal function at my wedding in Bombay in 1973, Brindamma sang some exquisite songs like Hastivadanaya (Navroj) and Shri venugopala (Kurinji) and I remember that I heard her beautiful, majestic voice through the microphone arranged for the occasion. This incident is etched in my mind very vividly. She also performed a chamber concert in the evening at the first floor hall, away from the reception downstairs, listened to in pin drop silence by connoisseurs.

One of the many compositions that she taught us in June 1973 soon after my wedding, was the padam in Sahana---Joodare. There is a phrase in this padam--"atha inti kodalu" in the anupallavi."Kodalu" means "daughter- in-law" in Telugu and both my mother- in- law Rajalakshmi Sethuraman and Brindamma used to endearingly call me "Kodalu" as I was the new daughter- in- law in the house!

In Dec 1974, Brindamma welcomed me to stay with her for a few days in her spacious bungalow "Saugandhini" in Gandhi Nagar, Adyar. I was 19 years old then and in awe of Brindamma. She put me at ease and showered her kindness and love on me. I had enrolled for music competitions in the Music Academy, The Tamil Isai Sangam and other sabhas in Madras and was visiting from Bombay.

She taught me many compositions of Arunachala Kavirayar--Annai Janaki (Saveri), Charanam Charanam (Asaveri), Vandaan vandaan Bharata (Madhyamavati);

Of Gopalakrishna Bharati--Vazhi maraithirukkude (Nattaikurinji) Satre vilagi (Purvikalyani)--during that period.

She wrote the sahyam of "Annai Janaki" for me and I still cherish and preserve her handwriting in my book.

Her rendering of Saveri with the kakali nishada lowered just a little bit was different and seemed to be so aesthetically pleasing. Whether she sang Daritapuleka, Sri Rajagoplala or Annai Janaki in Saveri, the flavour of the raga was unique.

She was happy and proud when I received the Rajaji Tambura Prize for Gopalakrishna Bharati songs at the Tamil Isai Sangam competition that year.

Her method of teaching-- by repeating a sangati many times till the student grasped its nuances, was a little different from the usual method of giving the notation beforehand. It may have been laborious for her--but she did not mind singing a phrase so many times. And that is why, perhaps, her patanthara, perfected over so many repetitions, bears an authentic stamp.

Brindamma was exceptionally meticulous and neat in her daily routine. Before going for an oil bath, she would remove her diamond ear and nose studs and place them carefully at the feet of the vigrahams of Krishna and Radha in our puja room. She dressed elegantly and in a simple manner without any ostentation. She was fond of the good things in life, enjoyed outings to the beach in Bombay or to the famous Mahalakshmi Temple. She relished having musumbi/sathukkudi juice in the afternoons after a music class session and my mother in law made sure that she herself made fresh juice for her in the hand machine.

Her eating habits were frugal. Before a concert, she would have just a couple of idlis with coffee.

It was a treat to watch her tune the tambura. The silken threads for "jiva" would be expertly put in place and the tambura sound would resonate in the entire room. Those were the days before the advent of the electronic tambura and it used to be an aural delight to listen to Brindamma's voice merge with the tambura in her concerts at the Bharatiya Music and Fine Arts Society or at the Bhulabhai Memorial Institute. Bombay's cognoscenti would gather together in anticipation of the musical treat.