



Padmabhushan Dr. M.L. Vasanthakumari

In every breath of hers, she echoed the saying,
'it is nice to be important, but even more important to be nice.'

- Sangeetham, a CMANA publication

Dr. M.L. VASANTHAKUMARI FELLOWSHIP A CMANA ENDOWMENT

Among all the musicians CMANA has had the privilege of being associated with, Sangeetha Kalanidhi Dr. M.L. Vasanthakumari occupies a very special place in our hearts. She was a true friend and well wisher of the Association who wholeheartedly shared and subscribed to our lofty goals and demonstrated the same repeatedly through her generous cooperation and contributions to CMANA. No one will doubt that she was a *sangeethasaagara* (an ocean of music) by all counts, a fact we unfortunately are unable to affirm through an award to her. However, hers is a legacy we have an obligation to remember and to cherish. By establishing this Fellowship, CMANA wishes to perpetuate MLV's memory and to celebrate the cooperation between artist and organization that is so critical to the sustenance of all art.

MLV's prowess as a musician is all too well known. Dr. V. Sadagopan has summarized MLV's genius through the following list: her extraordinary *manodharma*; inimitable skills in rendering *swara kalpanas*; unique talent in developing *taanam* and complete control over *kaalapramaanam*; remarkable skills in *raga alapana*; rich and varied repertoire of songs in many languages; dedication to the art of *pallavi* singing; capacity to handle *neravals* with taste and acumen; rapport with *laya* as demonstrated by handling of complex *talas* like *Misra Mukhi*; penchant for *srutibhedam* and verve to carry it off successfully; exquisite taste in compiling *ragamalikas* with delightful *rakthiragas*; ability in maintaining tempo throughout a concert; skills as a superb teacher; sharp eye in spotting young talent like Kanyakumari and Sudha Ragunathan; unswerving *bhakti* for her guru, the great GNB; her innovation in developing her own *bani* while basing them on the rich traditions inherited from her guru.

MLV's approach to music was one of total devotion. Speaking on the 51st anniversary of the Music Academy, Madras, she had said, "Music is oceanic in scope and a life time is not adequate to master itIn studying music, one must, therefore, have the attitude of a person doing Tapas or deep penance."

We, at CMANA, were blessed by her association with us. She has guided us in many ways in our early days. She was the first to tour the USA under CMANA's banner, and that she did for an absurdly low honorarium taking note of the fact that we were then a new organization with very limited resources. Later on, when CMANA celebrated the 500th birth anniversary of Saint Purandaradasa (the first such celebration in the world) and requested her to be the featured singer, she readily agreed cancelling other engagements and expecting nothing. When her proposed accompanists' visas were delayed and prevalent male chauvinism resulted in a potential (luckily unrealized) crisis of having no professional accompaniment, she offered to still sing with local amateur talent as accompanists. Such was her loyalty to her friends and to those who worked for a cause. We hope that in years to come, the Fellowship bearing her name will help to foster that level of generosity and understanding while imparting knowledge and nurturing talent.