

The contribution of music Academy Madras in encouraging women mridangam players-A study



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Paper received on : May 16, May 30, Accepted on October 17, 2022

Abstract

Music is a performing art. Musicians get inspiration and satisfaction by performing before an audience arranged by Sabhas/ Organizers which hitherto were patronized by Temples, Kings, and Zamindars. One such Institution is the Music Academy, Madras (MA), which has been conducting the Annual Conference and Concerts during mid-December for almost 15 days of ticketed and non ticketed concerts comprising Carnatic vocal, Instrumental, Harikatha, Nagaswaram, Hindusthani music, etc. from morning till late evening followed by Dance festivals. Vocal and Instrumental concerts are accompanied by mridangam, who are men in general. However, women mridangam players, though few in numbers, have been given opportunities for a very long time by MA which shows their commitment to promoting the art which is “talent-based” and not “gender-biased”, for which this study has been undertaken to bring it to the public domain the good work done by them. Data, retrieved from their official website, have been analyzed for the period 1935 to 2021 containing details of concerts for the periods 1935 to 1999, Annual Music conference, and Concert Souvenirs for the period 2000 to 2019, retrieved from their Archives, and digital concerts during the pandemic from 2020-2021. Analysis of the concerts for the aforesaid period shows that MA has been recognizing talents sans the gender, especially in mridangam and giving opportunities to several talented and meritorious musicians which needs appreciation.

Key Words: Sabhas, Organizers, Music Academy, Women, Mridangam

Research Paper

Introduction

If we see the ancient history of the Tamils, music performances were held in temples, then in the court of the Kings and the house of Zamindars. Although the musicians were well taken care of their family needs by Temples and the Kings, it was many Zamindars who took extra interest in helping musicians in all respects, so that their focus is only on music. One such example is Sri.Ghanam Krishna Iyer (1790–1854), contemporary of Saint Thyagaraja, who went to Kapistalam (Dist: Thanjavur, Tamilnadu), on invitation from one Zamindar Ramabhadra Moopanar and ensured that he was never disturbed in his practice sessions and honoured him with gold chain and a pair of diamond ear-rings. Such was his great admiration for Iyer.^[1] After the regime of Zamindars, came Sabha Ganam.^[2] Sabhas are Music organisations giving opportunities to musicians to perform before Rasikas (connoisseurs of music). MA has been organizing concerts and is engaged in music promotion

and education and occupies a special place in Carnatic music.

MA was established in the year 1927 pursuant to an All India Music Conference held in Madras (now Chennai)^[3] for the promotion of art. Initially, the concerts and other performances were held at different venues but started happening at their own Auditorium at Mowbray’s Road, Chennai. Young, budding artistes and veterans in their respective fields, be it vocal/instrumental, look forward to performing at MA which is a matter of pride and prestige. They also conduct Endowment programmes, HCL Concert series started in 1980, the Spirit of Youth and Dance festival started in 1989 and Annual competition and special events. MA annually gives the coveted Title-Sangita Kalanidhi to musicians in the field of music, Nritya Kalanidhi for dance and Sangita Kala Acharya for musicologists. Presently they have the 5-time slots (9.00 am-11.30 am), (11.45 am-1.15 pm), (1.30 pm-

3.30 pm), (4.00 pm-6.30 pm), and (6.45-9.15 pm) during the Annual Music Conference and Concerts. The artistes are allotted “time slots” as per their own selection procedure. The time slots in the MA is very critical for a musician as the concerts are reviewed by their own Committee members and any upgradation from 1st to 2nd or 2nd to 3rd slots is considered a promotion. For example, the vocalist Mrs. Sudha Raghunathan gave her vocal performance in the time slot (1-2.30 pm) on 21.12.1980 and then promoted to (2-4.00 pm.) slot on 27.12.1981 and further went to the next slot (4-6.30 pm) on 27.12.1992 and to the next slot (7-9.30 pm) on 28.12.1993 and in the year 2013 got the prestigious Sangeeta Kalanidhi award. MA has been giving opportunities to talented and meritorious musicians irrespective of gender. In this study, MA’s contribution towards encouraging Women mridangam players is taken for the periods 1935 to 2021. The data of concerts^[4] have been analyzed as follows:

Analysis of concerts:

- a. For the period 1935 to 2021, 3976* music concerts were held, comprising 506 male mridangam players who accompanied for 3864 concerts and 19 women mridangam accompanied for 112 concerts.

(*750 programs comprising of Dance, Harikatha, Hindusthani music, Sadas (Valedictory event) and insufficient data have been excluded).

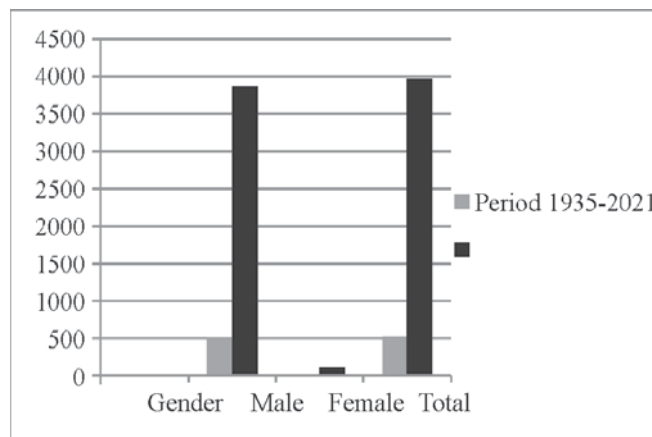
The Table-I and Graph given below shows the distribution of concerts between male and female mridangist:

Table-I

Table showing number of concerts held and the distribution between male and female mridangam players for the period 1935-2021

Gender	No of artistes	Concerts
Male	506	3864
Female	19	112
Total	525	3976

- b. For the period 1935-2006, 19 women mridangam players accompanied only women vocalist/ instrumental concerts.
- c. From 2007 onwards, one women mridangam player has been given opportunity to accompany five (5) male vocalists, which is very encouraging and appreciable.



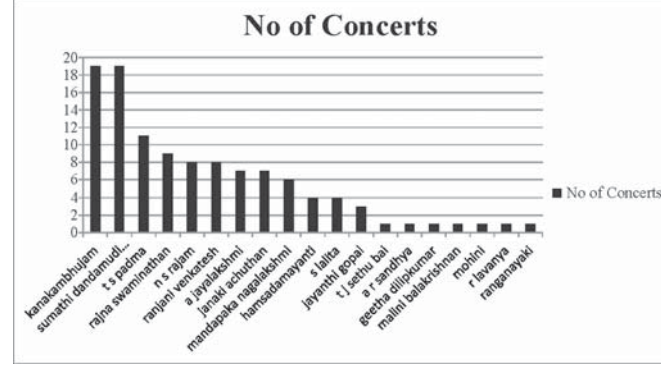
- d. The name of mridangam players have been given (since they are few in numbers) in Table-II along with graph showing the concerts played by each mridangam player

Table-II

Names of female Mridangam Players

S N.	Name	No of concerts
1	Smt. K V Kanakambhujam	19
2	Smt. Sumathi Dandamudi Rammohan Rao	19
3	Smt.T S Padma	11
4	Ms. Rajna Swaminathan	9
5	Smt. N S Rajam	8
6	Smt. Ranjani Venkatesh	8
7	Smt.A Jayalakshmi	7
8	Smt.Janaki Achuthan	7
9	Ms.Mandapaka Nagalakshmi	6
10	Smt.S P Hamsadamayanti	4
11	Smt.S Lalita	4
12	Smt. Shreejayanthi Gopal	3
13	Smt.T J Sethu Bai	1
14	Smt.A R Sandhya	1
15	Smt. Geetha Dilipkumar	1
16	Smt. Malini Balakrishnan	1
17	Smt.Mohini	1
18	Smt. R Lavanya	1
19	Smt.Tirukokarnam Ranganayaki	1
		112

- e. Senior mridangam player like Mrs. Sumathi Dandamudi Rammohan Rao started off in performing in “time slot” 12 to 1.30 pm from the year 1977 onwards and promoted to time slot 3.45 to 5.45 pm in the year 1994.



Conclusion

Thus we could see that MA has been consistently encouraging female mridangam players and this wonderful gesture is a great source of encouragement for many aspiring women mridangam players.

References

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