

Kapila ji I knew

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My association with Dr Kapila Vatyayan, Padma Vibhushan awardee, dates back to the 1960's which continued till she breathed her last. Both being of same age she would only call me Leela and would often call me up and tell me Leela I want you to do this work for me. She was deeply involved and passionate about every task she undertook and ensured no one messed up at any stage of its execution till its completion.

My brother-in-law Dr Raghava Pillai, an eminent Sanskrit scholar, was the Director of Oriental Manuscripts Library, Trivandrum that had a large collection of rare palm leaf manuscripts which were lying in a disorderly state, some even damaged due to moisture and others worm eaten. Kapila ji had just set up the IGNCA, her brainchild and when I approached her with the concern, without the usual bureaucratic delays in official approval, assigned me the task of ensuring in every possible way the preservation of the treasured collections. I being equally passionate about the same, with the help of a photo filming unit and Sanskrit pandit Dr. Potti and Mr Shah ji identified by my brother-in-law, with utmost care, compiled the scattered palm leaves into proper bundles and bindings for being properly placed in the respective shelves.

What brought me close to her was the rich treasure of living performing traditions that existed in the region of Kanyakumari district (now in Tamil Nadu) and the place where I grew up. That there existed the singing of Gita Govinda Ashtapadi-s, as an integral part of temple music of Kerala fascinated her and my research in the same, we immediately bonded and would discuss for hours on the same. Subsequently she asked me to record the same for the magnum multimedia project that IGNCA undertook with Xerox USA. This was one of its kind and a landmark achievement for IGNCA which included recordings of all arts both performing and visual by veteran artistes of both north and south India.

So also, as the Chairperson of the Asia Project of India International Centre (IIC), I and my daughter Deepti were often invited to present the folk music of Kerala that highlighted the typicality of musical notes and phrases that were exclusive to the music of the region.

She would quietly come unnoticed and sit at the backrow in the IIC auditorium and listen to the entire programme and later at some event would express her appreciation.

She seldom believed in secondary sources for forming any impressions or observations as far as the performing traditional artforms were concerned.

It was this attitude which helped preserve many dying performative traditions of India. Her contribution to the growth of any institution with which she was associated closely or otherwise, has been incomparable.

My memories of Kapila ji have been a long standing one which I shall cherish as long as I live.