

My memories of Kapila ji

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Padma Vibhushan Vidushi Kapila Vatsyayan was blessed with an unparalleled talent. I had the good fortune to observe her from close quarters. There are so many beautiful memories of her that are etched in my mind. She has left behind written works of monumental magnitude. I wish to share one or two of my personal experiences with you.

Once, Kapila ji was the Head of a two-day UGC Inspection Committee that was to visit the Rabindra Bharati University, that is situated in Kolkata. Upon reaching Calcutta (as it was called then), she entrusted me with the full responsibility with the inspection of the Music Department, and told me – “Your report must have their budget, requirements and all the other details.” Following her directive, I reached her room the next day, just as she was about to leave to inspect another department. She thoroughly read my report of the Music Faculty, approved it and kept it in a file. Then she told me – “You come with me”. I was hesitating as to how could I possibly accompany her, yet I did accompany her. Whichever department Kapila ji was visiting, be it the Department of History or the Department of Modern Indian Languages, it was appearing as if she was an expert in that field. And when she reached the Department of Philosophy, she had long conversations with the very many learned professors there. These professors at the end asked her many questions, which she replied in detail to everyone’s satisfaction. I thought then that Kapila ji was not just a brilliant scholar, but an extraordinarily brilliant scholar. It is not just difficult, but impossible, to have this kind of mastery over so many subjects in one lifetime.

I had the opportunity to sit with her on many occasions. I was fortunate to participate with her in the programme – ‘Sangeet Patrika’ of the All India Radio. Her heart seemed to be filled with universal warmth and affection for a common soul like me.

As you all know, IGNCAs were her brainchild. One of the series – ‘Kalâmoolgrantha mâlâ’ was the product of her ingeniously fertile mind. Her last discourse, a long one, delivered at the IGNCAs auditorium, was on ‘Geet Govindam’, which was a subject close to her heart.

The auditorium was filled to capacity, such was the clamour to hear her speak. The Chairperson – Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan – in his concluding remarks, said that never in all his tenure as the chairperson, had he seen such a large congregation of people at the IGNCA.

If I were to move away from academics, my guru Sangeet Martand Ustad Chand Khan saheb was, personally speaking, very close to Dr. Kapila ji. Many people do not know that they were known to each other since the 1940s and the 1950s. She graced many of the programmes that we organized, as the Chief Guest and the Guest of Honour. She used to recount many old interesting anecdotes, and how? In the typical Hindi of Delhi, not in English. During those times, she used to forget all about academics, and used to don the character of an artiste. Quite so, as you all must be knowing, because she was an excellent danseuse.

Lastly, what can I say? I pay my humble homage to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan ji who was a phenomenon in the field of art. I salute her inexhaustible erudition and total devotion to the cause of knowledge. May her noble soul rest in peace.