

# Colourful portraits of celebrated musicians

Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI:** "Kunja ground tamarind, chillies and salt. She made little balls out of the paste and thrust them into sticks. Tamarind lollipops!"

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"Soon, eleven-year old Mani became a favourite in school plays. In those days, dramas invariably included songs."

If you thought these are excerpts from stories on children, you're right. Just that these are children who went on to become two of the most respected and celebrated icons of Carnatic music - M.S. Subbulakshmi and G.N. Balasubramaniam.

The stories are from 'M.S. Subbulakshmi - The queen of song' and 'G.N. Balasubramaniam - Speed thrills', part of the 'Pictures of Melody' series launched at Landmark here on Wednesday.

The series, which seeks to present stalwarts in the field to a new audience in the format of a colourful picture book, is the brainchild of Lakshmi Devnath, who specialises in writing on arts, artists and art history.

Launching the series brought out by Heritage Publishing House, musician Bombay Jayashri said the books, with an appeal similar



**LEGION OF STALWARTS:** Musicians Sudha Raghunathan and Bombay Jayashri with Lakshmi Devnath (left), author of the 'Pictures of Melody', at the launch of the book series in Chennai on Wednesday - PHOTO: K.V.SRINIVASAN

to that of Amar Chitra Katha, were for everyone in the family. India needed to flaunt to the world, its very rich heritage in arts and culture. "It is wonderful to see these books on two people who are etched in our minds and hearts forever. We need many more books like these," she said.

Musician Sudha Raghunathan said rather than biographies, such books produced in easy-to-read, accessible formats were important to make future generations aware of such legends. Commending the author Ms. Devnath, she said: "She packs every line she writes with so

much emotion and passion."

Ms. Devnath said she was cautious while working on the project for it dealt with life stories of great masters. "Though I chose the comic format, I have been conscious that I am dealing with history." Creating stories around facts, in interesting settings

and contexts and conceiving these as visual sequences has meant a lot of research and hard work for the author.

Working on the series was a new experience for C.Thangavelu and G.Sekar, the artists who collaborated with her. Mr. Thangavelu, who was with the Zoological Survey of India for several years, says this was a welcome departure from sketching insects every day. "As a youngster, I dreamt of illustrating for picture stories, but never got to ... drawing GNB was a delight. The author gave us a lot of reference material and even posed for us to get some of the gestures right," he said.

Mr. Sekar, freelance illustrator for leading magazines, worked on the book on M.S. Subbulakshmi. "Over the years, there are minute and yet significant differences in the way she looks. It was quite a challenge to get those nuances right. Since this was not a cartoon or caricature, I was conscious of the responsibility I had in depicting a great artist. Towards the end of the book, I was moved by M.S. amma." Ms. Devnath is working on picture books on other icons such as saint-composer Annamacharya, celebrated musician Madurai Mani Iyer and Mridangam legend Palghat Mani Iyer.