

# Carnatic music, the comic book way

Lakshmi Devnath takes our musical heritage to the young through her colourful books

A digital print of a portrait of Swati Tirunal, the king and composer, stands out in Lakshmi Devnath's latest offering. It also carries a digital reproduction of his signature; a rare collector's item indeed! This new graphic novel, *Maharaja Swati Tirunal – A king and a composer*, details his life and music and is all set for a launch in the city on April 12. Following similar books, on the graphic format, about M.S. Subbulakshmi, T. Brinda, Madurai Mani Iyer and G.N. Balasubramaniam, Lakshmi presents this new volume, on the composer's bicentenary year. And almost all her books carry posters of the singers the book is about, along with a digital reproduction of their autograph. "Children have posters of cricketers and pop stars! So why not our own Carnatic stars?" asks Lakshmi. "I started working on this series back in 2011 because I wanted children to have access to these resources. I found that books on Carnatic musicians were for the mature reader. Many kids learn music. They will surely benefit from finding out the contributions of say MS or GNB," she says.

Lakshmi, who has also authored a children's fantasy title *Poorva – Magic, Miracles and the Mystical* (also available in Tamil, translated by Padma Narayanan) is also coming up with another book in the series called *Poorva – In The Vedic Age*. She is also the author of *An Incurable Romantic: The Musical Journey of Lalgudi Jayaraman*. While her graphic novel on T. Brinda's life was fully supported by the trust set up by singer Aruna Sairam, her latest books (Swati Tirunal and M.S. Subbulakshmi in Tamil) have been made possible with the help of a grant that she received from the Ministry of Culture.

"Initially, when I wanted to do this, publishing houses didn't show any in-



**BRINGING ALIVE** The lives of artistes PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

terest. So I decided to set out on my own!" she says. Lakshmi spends a lot of time researching and reading up on her subjects. She then sets out to write a short 'script'. "It's like writing a screenplay," she smiles. After a few rounds of editing, she meets with the artist and explains every frame to him. Her last few books including the latest were illustrated by Ajay Krishnan. Lakshmi is also thrilled about the fact that her book on the Travancore composer Swati Tirunal also has the stamp of approval from Prince Rama Varma.

"I am an avid reader. Half my life has been spent in book shops," says Lakshmi and adds, "Carnatic music is my passion. My mother was a really good singer, though she didn't give a lot of public performances. That people told her she sounded a lot like M.S. was her biggest source of contentment! I grew up listening to and learning music." It is this interest of Lakshmi's that has culminated in a series of books for children now available in book stores such as Starmark and Giri Traders, among others.

LAKSHMI KRUPA

*Maharaja Swati Tirunal – A king and a composer* will be launched along with Lakshmi Devnath's *M.S. Subbulakshmi – Isai Arasi*, in Tamil, part of the vernacular series of her books, on April 12, 6 p.m. at Raga Sudha Hall. The launch will be followed by a thematic concert of Swati Tirunal kritis and Tamil songs popularised by M.S. Subbulakshmi, rendered by Gayatri Venkataraghavan, accompanied on the violin by Pakkala Ramadas and Neyveli Skanda Subramanian on mridangam.