

Artist Column



The Queen of Thumri



PADAM VIBHUSHAN LEGENDRY GIRIJA DEVI

Girija Devi was born in Varanasi, on May 8 1929 to Ramdeo Rai, a Bhumihar Brahmin zamindar. Her father played the harmonium and taught music, and had Devi take lessons in singing khyal and tappa from vocalist and sarangi player Sarju Prasad Misra starting at the age of five. She starred in the movie Yaad rahe aged nine and continued her studies under Sri Chand Misra in a variety of styles.

Girija Devi made her public debut 1949 on All India Radio Allahabad, after getting married to a businessman circa 1946, but faced opposition from her mother and grandmother, because it was traditionally believed that no upper class woman should perform publicly. Devi agreed not to perform privately for others, but gave her first public concert in Ara city of Bihar in 1951. She studied with Sri Chand Misra until he died in the early 1960s, worked as a faculty member of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata in the 1980s and of the Banaras Hindu University during the early 1990s, and taught several students to preserve her musical heritage. Devi often toured and continues to perform in 2009.

Devi sings in the Banaras gharana and performs the purabi ang thumri style typical of the tradition, whose status she helped elevate. Her repertoire includes the semi-classical genres kajri, chaiti, and holi and she sings khyal, Indian folk music, and tappa. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians states that her semi-classical singing combines her classical training with the regional characteristics of the songs of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Devi was considered as "Queen Of Thumri" She is known to have been the teacher of the founder of The Alankar School of Music, Mrs. Mamta Bhargava whose Indian Classical music school has attracted students from hundreds of miles away. The queen of thumri passed away on 24 october 2017 in Kolkata .

Girija Devi was a genius in her sphere of Indian classical vocal rendition. This fact has further highlighted by the numerous prestigious awards that were conferred to her. For instance, she was given the Padma Shree in the year 1972 and the Padma Bhushan in 1989, and Padma Vibhushan in 2016. Received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1977 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship in 2010. Devi has received many more awards in which some are: Maha Sangeet Samman Award (2012) Sangeet Samman Award (Dover Lane Music Conference), GiMA Awards 2012 (Lifetime Achievement), TanaRiri Puraskar.



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