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## The 1974 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service

### CITATION for M.S. Subbulakshmi

*Ramon Magsaysay Award Presentation Ceremonies  
31 August 1974, Manila, Philippines*

Exacting purists acknowledge Srimati M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI as the leading exponent of classical and semi-classical songs in the Karnataka tradition of South India. They and ordinary people alike find in the compelling melody and sweetness of her bhajans, or folk spirituals, "a deep, pure and abstract emotional appeal," transporting them to a sense of unity with the supreme deity. Rooted in millenia of Indian culture and mythology, her bhajans are a means of prayer and solace in the villages where bhakti marg, or the way of devotion, supersedes more intellectual philosophies.

The gift of song that reaches the hearts of her countrymen results from a passionate pursuit of artistic excellence. As a girl of 10, in the South Indian cultural center of Madurai where she was born in 1916, SUBBULAKSHMI began accompanying her celebrated mother's singing and veena playing. An enchanting voice, hard work, exacting discipline, character, humility and willingness to learn from everyone, made her at the age of 17 a soloist in her own right. When, at the age of 24, she married T. Sadasivam—now publisher of the prestigious Tamil weekly, Kalki, in Madras—she gained also her "friend, philosopher and guide."

As, with maturing years, SUBBULAKSHMI's versatility encompassed Hindustani classics of North India and folk songs of many regions, her following grew far beyond the South; wider audiences first heard her in the film Meera. Mahatma Gandhi asked only to hear her sing "Hari Tuma Haro," or "Thou God," on his 78th birthday, which proved tragically to be his last. Jawaharlal Nehru, after hearing her sing, said, "Who am I, a mere Prime Minister, before a Queen of Song?"

On tours abroad SUBBULAKSHMI sang at the Edinburgh International Music Festival and before the United Nations. Her vocal "filigree," traversing three octaves, and fidelity to tone and rhythm reached through to listeners unfamiliar with melodic Indian music that neither needs nor implies harmony.

In April 1944, after five successful benefit performances given for the Memorial Fund honoring Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, SUBBULAKSHMI's voice became an instrument for public causes. Receipts of concert halls—filled to overflowing—and open amphitheatres—often packed with tens of thousands paying only four annas each (three U.S. cents) so as to deny no one the joy of her songs—have been given to constructive works. Equivalent to over one million U.S. dollars, her contributions have benefited foundations for the poor, hospitals, orphanages, schools, and music and journalism institutes. While becoming the idol of millions, this lady has remained deeply religious, unpretentious and almost childlike in her simplicity.

In electing Srimati M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI to receive the 1974 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service, the Board of Trustees recognizes her exalting rendition of devotional song and unanimous support of numerous public causes in India over four decades.

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