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Truly the nightingale of India: Manmohan

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 12. The Vice-President, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat; the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh; the Lok Sabha Speaker, Somnath Chatterjee; the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and other top leaders of the country today mourned the passing away of the music icon, M.S. Subbulakshmi, in Chennai on Saturday.

Mr. Shekhawat said that Subbulakshmi was a jewel in the world of music, the likes of whom are born only once in ages. Her passing away was an irreparable loss to the world of music and her immortal music would always remain in our hearts.

Expressing sorrow at the passing away of the "great M.S.," Dr. Singh, in his message, said that she was truly the nightingale of India and her voice would continue to ring for centuries to come. "I am deeply saddened by the passing away of this great soul, but everyone of us know that her voice will ring true for centuries to come. I join her family, her disciples and her many admirers in mourning her demise."

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He also recalled how Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were mesmerised by her music. "It was not an exaggeration when Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Subbulakshmi, when singing, comes closer to God and the same happens to those who listen to her.' Pandit Nehru said in her presence, 'what am I, a mere Prime Minister, before the Queen of Music.'"

Mr. Chatterjee said that in the passing away of M. S., the nation and the world had not only lost a great musician, but also a humanist and a philanthropist.

"Her legacy will continue"

Ms. Gandhi said that M.S. was more than an individual endowed with unparalleled musical gifts.

She also recalled that though M.S. was devout she was free from bigotry and hatred, "symbolising the very essence of our culture and tradition."

"She may have passed away, but she will continue to live in our hearts. Her legacy will continue to serve as a beacon not only to those in the world of music and art, but also to others in search of professional excellence and perfection.

"Her music moved us, but it was her values, her style of living, her magnanimous nature and her multi-faceted personality that endeared her to all of us. This is a sad moment and my sympathies go out to her family. Smt. Subbulakshmi belonged to the entire country and indeed to all humanity."

"Synonymous with compassion"

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, described M.S. as a great singer, and an even greater human being.

In her message, Ms. Jayalalithaa said she was shocked and grieved to hear of the passing away of M.S., who was "one of the greatest exponents of Carnatic music of our times. She was the soul of simplicity and humility. The sweetness and spirituality of her music provided millions of Indians the direct medium for daily communion with God."

"She was an illustrious daughter of Tamil Nadu, but the

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universality of her divine music has given her to the whole world. An entire generation of Indians has grown up listening to the mellifluous beauty of her songs that have generated emotions of joy, devotion and patriotism. The ethereal beauty of her voice and the soulfulness of her rendering have imbued the Kirthanaas, bhajans and hymns that she sang with a unique sanctity that deeply moved people of all castes, religions, languages, ages and income groups transcending all human barriers."

Although she had received several awards, no award could equal the universal recognition of the fact that her name was synonymous with "compassion" and "charity." "She donated virtually all that she earned to build up scores of charitable institutions in India and abroad.

"Our only consolation is that though her physical presence will no longer be amongst us, her divine voice will continue to live amongst us and will continue to enthral millions of people all over the world in the form of records, tapes, audio cassettes, compact discs etc., as long as this world lasts," Ms. Jayalalitha said.

In his tribute, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, West Bengal Governor-designate, said: "Subbulakshmi cannot die, she can only move from an ethereal presence into immortality. Her music belongs now to the spheres."

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