



## ARTIST T.K. PADMINI

### Memoir

Edasseri

ARTIST  
T.K. PADMINI  
Memoir  
Translation of  
Edasseri's essay  
by E. Madhavan

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The untimely demise of T.K. Padmini has been a loss, which cannot be mitigated, both for the world of "Chitra Kala"<sup>1</sup> and Kerala State. She<sup>2</sup> was born on May 2, 1940 in Thozhukkad Kadancheri Tharavad in Kaladi Amsam in Ponnani Taluk. She left us forever in the same place on her Pirannal day (date of birth as per Malayalam calendar) on May 11, 1969. In less than three decades, the devotee of art, as she was, could make indelible mark of her personality in the magical universe of lines and colours!

Another painter Shri K. Damodaran (from Thalasseri) had married her. It was in 1968 in the month of May. After their marriage both of them visited our home as guests. The groom was of calm disposition speaking very less. On his face manifested maturity far beyond his age. Seeing our beloved with him, we felt as if a long awaited wish has been fulfilled. Further a sense of relief too set in that the child with singular pursuit of art in her life had her life secured with the wedlock. When the partners are capable of appreciating each other's qualities, their married life is bound to be enjoyable.

She completed her secondary education in the year 1956. For the next two years or so, she stayed with us for the purpose of practicing drawing under Shri K.L. Devassy, who was the art teacher in A.V. High School. We accepted her into the household with love for a daughter. The arrival of the adolescent girl with lush hair, wide eyes and melting smile brightened the ambience of our home.

Our children promptly developed attachment to her. They called her "Padminiedathy" (elder sister Padmini). More than love, her demeanor inspired respect. She had dreaming eyes incapable of admonishing. However, her approach to the art, which she worshipped, being serious the children never tried to rush into her workshop or distract her with their nagging. This was incredible indeed.

Their sense of adulation for her would have increased on another count too. In no time Padmini would draw their pencil sketch! Those sketches were true to and full of life. Perhaps, there must have been an automatic refrain in those tender minds that they should conduct themselves only with utmost respect in front of such an abounding genius.



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I learnt from this girl the full meaning of sincerity and commitment to art. Later on I had occasion to read a Hindi poem "Kavithayum Savithayum". The girl Savitha in that poem reminded me of Padmini. In that poem Kavitha tells the poet (Kavi): "You wish to become a citizen who is interested in earning fame and wealth. Good! But Thou who art immersed in activities other than Poetry are cheating on her. The practical mind is the hunter's arrow which separate permanently from one another the 'Croucha Mithuna' (twin-birds) of Kavitha (poetry) and Kavi (poet)."

The above view is true for 'chitra kala' also. It would appear that such a view sprang and embedded in her mind at such a tender age.

I feel that Keralites are not as familiar with 'Chitra Kala' as they are with literature or rather, they do not take kindly to it. With the spread of literacy, literature has prospered in the market. Hence, the parents today do not scold a child who embarks on literary pursuits, as those in the past used to do. Drawing pictures is not viewed in the same manner. In the eyes of the elders it is still a useless work and waste of time. It is not on account of respect for "Art" that a person with Bachelor of Art (B.A) degree came to be respected in our country in the past; but on account of the scope the degree afforded for better prospects for employment. But there are no known cases where somebody has earned a few nickels for his family by way of remuneration from drawing pictures. The reason why this situation is narrated here is to emphasise the fact that the art talent which was irrepressibly growing in Padmini was not appreciated in the environment in which she grew. But she has one blessing in the form of her maternal uncle Mr T.K. Divakaran. A man who has perceived the new light of the world appropriately encouraged and supported his niece. It was he who sent her to the Arts and Crafts College in Madras, which provided her the opportunity to practise art under the Principal of the college Mr K.C.S. Panikker, the world renowned painter and artist. In the occasional letters, which the affectionate uncle wrote to me, he had not even once forgotten to mention joyfully the advancement and success of his niece. The student joined the College of Arts in 1961. In 1963-64 she had earned the Academy certificates for the best painting. She bagged the Association of Young Painters Award in 1965 and Madras State Lalitha Kala Academy Award in 1967. Securing double promotion twice she completed the six year course in just four years.

In the meanwhile, her paintings were exhibited in the National Exhibition in Delhi and Arts Society's Exhibition in Bombay. Padmini's paintings were also on show in many important exhibitions in Madras.



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I saw her in Madras in 1967. On my return home, I faltered while answering to several of my wife's pointed queries about Padmini's well being, posed with much eagerness. Because, in front of Padmini I had been only a listener! She spoke to me about paintings and great men who were painters; and much more remained to be said. During this I could not even ask where she was residing. To my wife's question "How is she" I escaped answering "She is fine". "Has she grown?" I could not answer that. In fact she would have, in tune with her age, burgeoned and assumed rainbow hues. But the special effects, which those dreaming eyes provided to her face remained unchanged and that only did I carry back in my heart. The question "Has she grown" may have deeper meanings. Nevertheless, anybody who talked to her would have failed to recollect anything even remotely connecting her artist's life with garhasthya (the family).

Learning about her bagging the prestigious Lalitha Kala Akademi Award, for some time I too felt infected with the high levels of motivation which was resonating in her in the beginning of the year. Whatever unreal pride love generates!

That light has gone. Suddenly. I had heard that she had come to her mother for her first delivery. But, I could not meet her. Despite the advances in modern medicine and medical facilities not being rare in our villages, pregnancy and delivery remain a game of chance. In the same handwriting, which scribbled the success tales of that little life, we took in the never-ending sorrow too. We had only one prayer, let that loving uncle has the strength to bear this too. Although incomplete, her life devoted to art will live in her works. I hope the connoisseurs of art would come forward to preserve her work appropriately.

Translated from Malayalam by E. Madhavan

Notes by the translator:

1 "The phrase "Chitra Kala" in Malayalam embraces the whole range of drawing, painting, murals, graphics etc. This phrase is used in this article for want of an equivalent elegant, single word in English.

2 Edasseri has used the pronoun "She" (in Malayalam 'aval' a word to informally refer to persons much younger in age) throughout the memoir. The use of the word "Aval (she)" reveals his paternal intimacy with the artist, which appears to have set the tone in this piece.

3 The allusion is to the lines "Maa Nishada....".