

SUMMARY

At the end of every concert, the admirers of Selvi gathered round her for her autograph. They escorted her to the car with Mohan, her husband. None of her admirers had even the privilege of meeting her in privacy, even with gifts, because Mohan never allowed her to speak to anyone except in his presence. Mohan had been a follower of Gandhiji and suffered imprisonment. But this was evident only in his dress ; his life-style, attitude and inclination were not those of a true follower of Gandhiji.

Varma was the proprietor of the Boardless. He was one of the admirers of Selvi. He longed for giving her a present himself. But whenever he carried gift for her, he was disappointed, because Mohan took it from him and turned him back from the porch.

Mohan and Selvi lived in a magnificent building of East India Company days, with tall doors and Gothic windows, and Venetian shutters. The house was said to be haunted by the ghost of Sir Frederick Lawley, the former owner of the house. Mohan bought the house with the money Selvi earned as a play-back singer in a film.

Mohan tried hard for years to build up Selvi's image, and the time came when she became a celebrated singer. She was in demand all over the country. It was Mohan who managed all the professional matters of Selvi, accepting or rejecting offers, and sometimes accepting no remuneration for the performance itself, but demanding expenses that would be equal to her normal fees. He knew very well how to make money without paying income tax for it.

At the Boardless people speculated about Selvi's early life. Varma heard at the gossip table that Selvi lived in a small house at Vinayak Mudali Street with her mother, brother and sister. She had learnt music from her mother. Selvi and her mother met Mohan at his photo studio on Market Road. Thereafter Mohan would often come to their house and listen to Selvi's song. Gradually their intimacy grew, and one day Selvi became Mohan's wife. But no one could say with certainty when and how they were married.

However, in course of time Selvi's fame as a singer spread far and wide, and she became a national figure. She was called the Goddess of Melody. Her voice had such a captivating charm that the audience would be enthralled by her song.

During her musical performance on every occasion, whether in the country or abroad, Mohan would sit in the first row of the auditorium, keeping his eyes on her all the time. Besides, before each of her programmes he could select for her which raga to sing first and which

one to come next. Selvi had almost no choice in this matter. She was always unenquiring and uncomplaining, speaking very little and accepting every-thing done or planned by Mohan without protest. Even when distinguished visitors came to meet her, she would do and say only what she was tutored by Mohan. Mohan would congratulate himself on shaping her up so successfully into a celebrity. And in doing so he gradually isolated her from her mother, brother and sister.

Months and years passed in this way. Mohan and Selvi were in Calcutta when they got the news of her mother's death. All her engagements were cancelled and Mohan took her to Vinayak Mudali Street. Selvi did not agree to go back with Mohan. She would not leave her mother's house. She wanted to stay there in spite of Mohan's objection. She expressed her desire firmly. Mohan was astonished to see Selvi speaking out her mind in so many words, which was unusual with her. Her mother's death was a turning point in her life, changing altogether her attitude, behaviour and personality.

So Selvi stayed there. Mohan came to her again and again to take her with him, but she refused to go. She was firm in her decision.

People gathered in her house every day to listen to her song. News about her free music sessions spread. People thronged there in cars, bicycles and on foot. Varma of The Boardless brought a gift for her and presented it to Selvi. His long-cherished desire to approach Selvi with an offering was at last fulfilled.

One night at 11 o'clock Mohan came to Selvi, thinking that at that time he would be able to talk to her privately, not in the presence of the crowd that was always there during day-time. But he had to leave the house from the door when Selvi, hearing his call, opened a window shutter and told him to go away. Mohan went away, swearing half-aloud, "Ungrateful wretch".