



Entertainment Chennai and Tamil Nadu

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He came, he achieved ... and vanished

Singer, actor, writer and composer V. V. Sadagopan, whose 91st birthday was celebrated recently, disappeared from the scene all of a sudden in 1980, writes SUJATHA VIJAYARAGHAVAN. Read on to know more about the enigmatic musician ...



Sadagopan... youthful and charismatic

"HE WAS a star, handsome and charismatic. He was a graduate and an acclaimed Carnatic musician. When I learnt that the producers of the new film were planning to have him as the hero, I knew that I stood no chance of being considered for the role." The actor who wrote thus in his autobiography in later years was none other than M. G. Ramachandran, the most charismatic film personality this country has ever seen. And the hero described by him is V. V. Sadagopan (VVS).

Viravanallur Vedantam Sadagopan was born on January 29, 1915, in an orthodox Vaishnavite family and spent his childhood and youth in Tirunelveli. He was a graduate and pursued a parallel vocation in music. He had his musical training under Namakkal Sesha Iyengar and Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar and became one of the most sought after musicians in the 1930s. At the height of his musical career he entered films and was hailed as Rudolf Valentino of the Indian screen. His films included "Athisayam" and "Madanakamarajan." It was an era when actors were chosen for their musical skills and good looks, as they had to sing their songs on screen. "Navayuvan," in which he played the hero, is said to be the

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first Indian film to have had scenes shot in a foreign location. VVS sailed to London for the purpose and photographs of the hero in a suit were splashed in the press, as part of the publicity for the film.

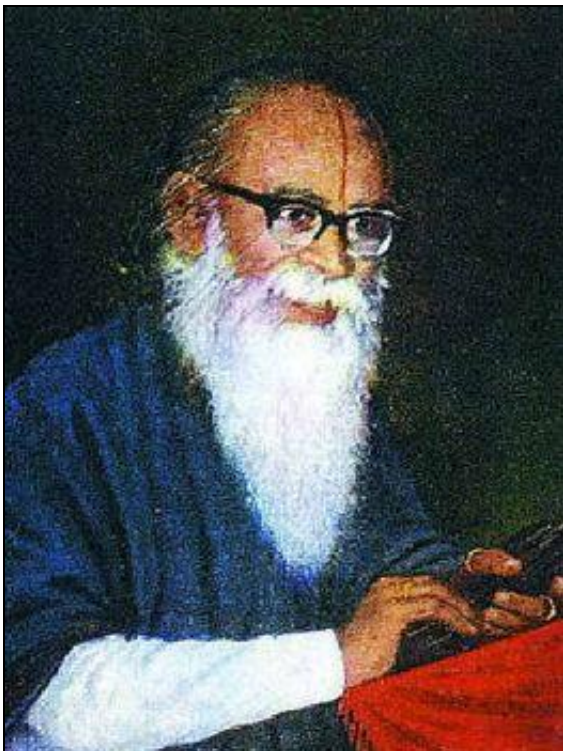
Back to the stage

The introduction of playback singing ended the choice of singing stars and VVS returned to the concert platform in 1943. On his return one of the critics of the day heralded: "Here comes Sadagopan, make way..." He was a rare combination of a musician and a musicologist and won acclaim in both fields. He was a prolific writer in English and Tamil and a composer in several languages. Apart from articles on music he has written poetry, lyrics and even a number of stories in Tamil, which were published in *Ananda Vikatan*. He served as the Director for Music Studies at Gandhigram Rural Institute, Madurai. He trained several students, noteworthy among them being Shyamala Balakrishnan, who researched on folk music of Tamil Nadu under his guidance.

He served two terms as Professor at the University of Delhi and was a member of the Board of Studies in several universities. He was a member of the audition panel of All India Radio and also of the experts committee of the Music Academy, Madras. He travelled all over the country and abroad for his lecture-cum-concerts. Unique compositions

VVS's compositions include kritis, keerthanais, ragamaligais, padams, kili kanni and a series of Tirukkural keerthanais, wherein the Kural forms the pallavi and is elaborated in the anupallavi and charanam. As a music composer he has left behind a lasting legacy. The famous, "Gana Mazhai Pozhigindraan," is from the first volume of Ambujam Krishna's songs, which he set to music. He was the first to render a whole concert of Kamba Ramayanam verses at the Kamban Vizha at Karaikudi — the music for which were composed by him. He also set to music several pasurams of Divya Prabandham. His close friendship with great scholars like Mi. Pa. Somasundaram inspired him to delve deep into Tamil literature and set several pieces to music.

Music education for children became his passion and mission in later years. He called his integrative scheme of music education Tyagabharati, a term he had coined to epitomise the ideals of Tyagaraja and Subrahmanya Bharati. In this he struck an entirely new path, composing nursery rhymes in Tamil and Hindi, set to simple lilting tunes.



Mellowed into a scholar with a vision

As a visionary he was far ahead of his time. The children whom he taught songs and dances ("Roja Chedi Oru Rani" and "Paatti nalla paatti" and several others) with joy and abandon on the green lawns of India Gate, New Delhi, lapped them all up. .

Mysterious exit

However the elders, comprising his friends and well wishers often stood perplexed, unable to comprehend the new role that this musical giant had donned. On April 10, 1980, he left Delhi by train, for Madras. He was seen alighting at Gudur, the next day. He has not been seen ever since. Rumours of sighting him in Varanasi and the Himalayas and consequent searches have yielded no results.

The mantle then fell on his devoted disciple Srirama Bharati, a visionary in his own right. The disciple who gave up a doctorate obtained in the U.S., returned to India to learn under the feet of his chosen master, in the hoary Gurukulam tradition. Imbibing the essence of Sadagopan's ideals, Srirama Bharati gave them a practical and concrete form by way of music education in schools and teaching songs to women and other social groups. He had brought out a volume of Sadagopan's articles and lectures under the title, "Spirals and Circles." The Indian Music Journal was revived by him and he translated Nalayira Divya Prabandham, the 4, 000 verses of the Azhwars. Cassettes of pasurams set to music by Srirama Bharati and his master have been released. The nursery rhymes were sung by Sadagopan's children and grandchildren and were released as a set of two cassettes under the title Tyaga Bharati songs. Srirama Bharati's sojourn at Melkote gave him the opportunity to learn the tradition of Arayar Sevai, which he performed widely, donning the ornate crown and ankle bells.

Srirama Bharati accomplished the miraculous when he single-handedly built a temple for Muddu Tirunarayanawamy at Jalladampet, a marshy no man's land in the outskirts of Madras. Soon the colony of Sadagopan Nagar came up around the temple. The community was drawn together by music, the temple serving as the focal point.

Srirama Bharati passed away at a young age. His wife Sowbhagyalakshmi carries on his work with the same fervour and dynamism. On January 29, Sadagopan's 91st birthday was celebrated at the temple premises. An attractive volume on Sadagopan and a set of CDs of his concerts were released on the occasion. Children of the village rendered Tiruppavai in chorus, a young lad performed the abhinaya of Araiyar Sevai, and a choral group of women led by Sowbhagyalakshmi sang Sadagopan's compositions. Friends and family members including Ranganayaki Sadagopan, formed part of the gathering. Sadagopan in the form of an icon installed at the temple, presided over the events, and his prime disciple Srirama Bharati, also an icon, stood beside with folded hands.

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