

MYSORE VASUDEVACHAR (part 2)

The nadopasaka at Kalakshetra

V.R. Devika

*T*apah swadhyaya niratam, tapasvi vagvidam varam...”

Three generations of ardent connoisseurs of the Kalakshetra *Ramayana* productions say they feel a thrill when the first lines of the Balakanda of the *Ramayana* are sung at Kalakshetra’s *Sita Swayamvaram* in the *Ramayana* series.

‘When Veena Sambasiva Iyer heard this song, he said to Vasudevacharya, “If only I were a Maharaja, I would present you one crore of rupees for just that composition alone.” So *Ramayana* began under such tremendous auspices,” Rukmini Devi Arundale wrote in her tribute to Mysore Vasudevachar during his centenary celebrations.

He was 88 years old when Rukmini Devi went to Mysore to invite him to come to Madras to compose music for the production of the Valmiki *Ramayana* that she wanted to choreograph. When she enquired if he could come, he replied, “Certainly I will come, but I must make sure that His Highness the Maharaja would allow

Sambasiva Iyer and Vasudevachar



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me to go because my first duty is to him.” When Rukmini Devi asked him if he would come if the Maharaja allowed him, Vasudevachar said, “Of course, I will come, but even then, I shall consider myself an *asthana vidwan* of Mysore.”

It was Tiger Varadachariar who had spoken to Rukmini Devi Arundale about Mysore Vasudevachar. She had asked him if there was anyone else besides him who truly represented the music of Patnam Subramania Iyer. He answered that there was only one such *sishya*, and it was Mysore Vasudevachar. Within a few days after this conversation, Tiger Varadachariar

came rushing to her, saying that Vasudevachar was in Madras. Rukmini Devi writes that she was witness to the most beautiful way in which the two great *vidwans* greeted each other, prostrating each before the other. She was completely charmed by him. Vasudevachar turned out to be easily approachable, humorous and a gracious individual. At his concert at the Madras Madhwa Sangh, his music thrilled her. She writes, “His voice was full of *jeeva* and *gamakas* and his singing with such a strong voice, in perfect *sruti* was most remarkable considering his age. Not only this, he sang with the greatest ease so that one had the feeling that one could go



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MYSORE VASUDEVACHAR

home and sing exactly the same way. This feeling he always conveyed even at the age of 96 when he was still singing. Only when one tried, did one find how deceptive this ease was. I told Tiger that we must somehow see that Vasudevacharya was invited to sing in Adyar.”

Vasudevachar sang at the Sangita Shiromani concert in Adyar with complete mastery. His *tanam* was marvellous, describes Rukmini Devi and that she had never heard the likes of that before or after. Vasudevachar was able to produce more sound effects with his voice than Tiger himself who told Rukmini Devi that this was the real ancient way of singing *tanam*.