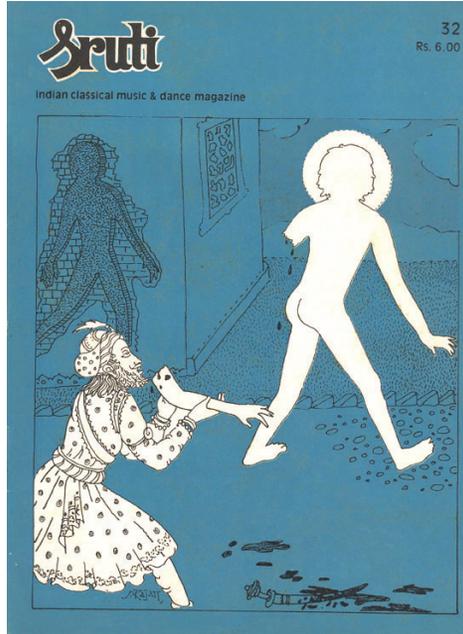


Sadasiva Brahmendra aradhana at Manamadurai

Conducting aradhana for saints as 'utsavam' (festival) has become an established tradition in Tamil Nadu. The reverence and involvement of the people are more marked if the personalities have left a legacy of devotional hymns presented in concerts. Sadasiva Brahmendra has an important place in this galaxy. There are many stories about this composer-saint of the 18th century. According to legend, this 'avadhoota sanyasi' whose parents named him Sivaramakrishnan — attained 'jeeva samadhi' around 1750. Full details about this saint are difficult to ascertain. Many miracles are attributed to him.

The aradhana for Brahmendra also called 'mauna guru' is organised regularly at Nerur and Manamadurai. He is credited with the authorship of several grantha-s and verses soaked in philosophy, propagating advaita and also 'nama smarana'. Among the grantha-s, only *Atma Vidya Vilasam* is available.

Only 23 songs of Sadasiva Brahmendra are in circulation, including popular ones like *Manasa sancharare*, *Sarvam Brahmamayam*, *Broobi mukundeti*, and *Jaya tunga*



Front cover of *Sruti* 32

tarange Gangey. (Nine of these rendered by Sudha Ragunathan, are in a CD devoted exclusively to the songs of this saint. Selected songs also form part of the repertoire in many other recordings by different artists.)

While the aradhana at Nerur is a century old, the event in Manamadurai commenced 30 years ago as desired by the Kanchi Paramacharya after the identification of the samadhi (of the 'sookshma

sareeram') spot, within the premises of the Somanatha Temple. It is interesting to note that the stone was worshipped by the locals as 'vayattu vali saami' for curing stomach pain! An image of the saint can be spotted among the figures adorning the temple gopuram.

B.V. Raman (of the Raman-Lakshmanan duo) is referred to as the founder of the organising committee; Karai A. Shangarsethu (correspondent, *Sruti*) and Tiruvenkadu Jayaraman were also actively involved from the beginning. At present, the Committee is headed by P.S. Narayanaswamy, who is also a trustee along with the Bombay Sisters, Srimushnam Raja Rao, 'Mandolin' U. Shrinivas, and 'Cleveland' V.V. Sundaram among others.

The utsavam at Manamadurai has now grown into a major three-day congregation. It has gained in stature and acquired multiple components like discourse, musical tribute, divyanamam, public feeding, which are held in a Kalyana Mandapam.

The core event, the 'adhishthana poojai' (with 108 varieties of herbs) is held at the samadhi. Goshti ganam including select songs on

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different saints, by saint-composers, form part of the proceedings. P.S. Narayanaswamy and Raja Rao were active participants, the former leading the group rendering. Some rituals were conducted at the Sringeri Mutt adjacent to the temple.

As is the case with such events, there is a tendency to add on several items of ritual and conventional nature, which often account for the major share of the arrangements and the expenditure. The estimated expenditure is said to be around three lakhs not including the implied costs of facilities offered free by the locally resourceful Nadar community. The organisers need to be cautious about the limits of expanding the scale of the celebrations despite pressures. This however, speaks volumes for the reverence for Sadasiva Brahmendra cutting across barriers, and the goodwill earned and sustained by the organisers.

The programming at the 31st festival held from 10th to 12th May, also reflected an inclusive approach. There was a lecture titled *Guru Arulum Tiru Arulum* by 'Kamban



P.S. Narayanaswamy and Srimushnam Raja Rao lead the chorus

Adisudi' Pala Palaniappan. Two veteran vidwans, Tirugokarnam Chellaiah (tavil) and Tiruvellore Parthasarathi (violin) were felicitated. Music concerts featured talents spanning generations including nagaswaram by the couple, Sheik Mehboob Subhani and Kalishabee. Special mention may be made of the duet presented by Pandimurugan and Zakir introduced as the 'Academy Brothers'. Both are autorickshaw drivers in Chennai

pursuing their passion for music at the Music Academy during the day. An eloquent illustration indeed for the promotion of integration and harmony through music!

The repertoire presented at the aradhana was not confined to the songs of Brahmendra. Meesu Krishnayyar's compositions were among the other songs featured in some of the concerts. Abhang-s were presented by Savita Sreeram. A dedicated CD on this genre featuring the same artist, brought out by the recently set up Brahmam Audios as their maiden offering, was released on the occasion.

Shangarasethu was the emcee providing valuable information and many historical details. Among the other dynamic functionaries, Karai Jaisankar and A.S. Murali were outstanding for effective coordination and logistics management.

The response to the festival was very encouraging despite the minimum publicity. People from nearby villages were among the interested audience.

MANNA SRINIVASAN

Manna Srinivasan, V.V. Sundaram, P.S. Narayanaswamy with T. Chellaiah and T. Parthasarathi

