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TRIBUTE

Living the values of the freedom struggle

T. Sadasivam, 1902-1997.

GOWRI RAMNARAYAN

T. SADASIVAM led a full, rich life for 95 years, a life full of achievements in many fields. He remained steadfast to his ideal of serving the nation and his fellow human beings. He showed unstinting loyalty to his chosen leader, and complete reverence to his spiritual guru. Above all, he did what few men have done - he gave single-minded devotion to his wife, whose genius he recognised, fostered, guarded and presented to the world as a precious gift.

Thiagarajan Sadasivam died on November 21, leaving his spouse of 60 years, legendary Carnatic vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi, mourning for him with the helpless bewilderment of a child. "Whatever I did in my life and music was guided entirely by him," M.S. said. "What the world calls my achievements are his gifts to me."

From any perspective, Sadasivam's life appears extraordinary. Born in 1902 into an orthodox Brahmin family, the young firebrand quit school to join the freedom struggle. He was initially a sympathiser of the revolutionary stream of the movement, but later adopted Gandhiji's philosophy of *ahimsa*. He made a dramatic entry into the nationalist movement by running after a horse carriage in which sat the fiery freedom fighter, Subramania Siva. "Will you let me join your Bharat Samaj?" asked the young Sadasivam. When Siva asked if he would give up his life for the country, the answer was an instant, forceful "yes". Recalling those days, Sadasivam would say, "For years I tended Siva and prayed that his leprosy be miraculously transferred to me so that the country could benefit from his leadership."

By 1920, Sadasivam had been drawn into the Civil Disobedience Movement led by C. Rajagopalachari. His musical talent surfaced as he marched from village to village, singing with fervour patriotic songs, especially those of Subramanya Bharati.

His emotional singing inspired people to forsake mill cloth imported from Britain and make bonfires of foreign clothes.

Sadasivam's political involvement continued in constructive ways even after India attained independence. His home was where Congress leaders from the north stayed whenever they came to Chennai. He was a personal friend of the Nehru family - three generations of whom have loved M.S. Subbulakshmi music - but that did not prevent him from playing host to non-Congress leaders during the Emergency.

T. Sadasivam and M.S. Subbulakshmi.

S.THANTHONI



"Sadasivam is to me what Lakshmana was to Rama," Rajagopalachari once said. The former Governor-General of India and founder of the Swatantra Party was Sadasivam's guru, political and otherwise. Through *Kalki* in Tamil and *Swarajya* in English, he made sure the voice of the elder statesman was heard far and wide.

Sadasivam and his friend "Kalki" R. Krishnamurti had left *Ananda Vikatan* to launch *Kalki* in 1941, as a nationalist weekly. Krishnamurti, who was its editor, died in 1954. Sadasivam continued to maintain the ideals and standards of the magazine, refusing to make any compromise.

Sadasivam's friendships were life long. It was not only to his social equals whom Sadasivam remained a faithful friend. To the end, he was always assisting the needy and helping those who approached him to secure employment. These were in addition to the enormous contributions to charity (over Rs. 4 crores) he helped Subbulakshmi make out of her earnings through music. When an industrialist friend complained that Sadasivam's candidate for a job was not even a matriculate, pat came the reply. "Neither you nor I finished school. What difference did that make? This man needs the job."

With undimmed zeal he pursued the last goal of his life - raising funds for building a *mani mandapam* near Kanchipuram to commemorate his spiritual leader, the late Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the Sankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetham, whom he worshiped as "God on earth".

Sadasivam loved children, with whom he shared his feeling for nature and sense of fun. Succeeding generations of children in the extended family received his undivided attention when he spent time with them, often singing for them nationalist songs in a spirited manner as he recounted the stirring days of his youth.

The story of his marriage to M.S., the films he produced with her in the lead to raise funds for *Kalki*, and his nurturing of her career until she became a world celebrity has been told many times. Subbulakshmi would often say, "My husband always assured me that if I sang with true feeling, listeners would automatically be drawn to me." He was particular about diction and sometimes suggested the emphasis in the verses she sang. These verses were chosen by him from the devotional and contemplative lyrics of saint poets from every part of India. His own genuine feeling for the *raga alapana* influenced his

wife's music. He had a deep appreciation of the noble teachings of the lyrics, repeating them in the original language and explaining them in Tamil. An example is this lyric from the Guru Granth Sahib - "*Krodh na choda, jhoot na choda, satyavachan kyon chod diya*" - where the poet admonishes mankind "You have not renounced wrath nor deception - why have you renounced the truth?" He sometimes told his wife to repeat a certain phrase to evoke new levels of poignancy as, for instance, the query in "*Marachiti vo, ma Ramana?*" (Have you forgotten, O Lord?) in a kriti by Karnataka's H. Yoganarasimham.

To Sadasivam, as to Subbulakshmi, music was a vehicle of communication between human beings and God as also a way of touching a common chord in people from different parts of the country and the world. He planned every concert of Subbulakshmi to the last detail. Songs in different Indian languages were included, but each concert also had compositions appropriate to the occasion and the place. Often he included a lyric with what he considered a vital and relevant message, as in a poem of Bharati that stresses the equality of all human beings irrespective of caste, creed and gender.

Sadasivam began his career in advertising and publicity; while he earned the admiration of professionals in those fields, he used his promotional and public relations skills for far greater purposes than others.

One of the last of the generation of freedom fighters, he withdrew from active political involvement after the death of Rajagopalachari. His concern for the nation and for the individuals who approached him for help remained strong till the end.

Explaining his philosophy, he once said: "I don't believe in building a university after hoarding a huge sum for that purpose. Money corrupts. I would rather do whatever I can every single day to help as many people as I can." He had the complete support of his wife in putting his beliefs into practice. To those who lamented the decline in qualities such as simplicity, austerity, service-mindedness and generosity in post-Independence India, Sadasivam remained a redoubtable torchbearer of the old virtues. For those who came into contact with him his was an influence that caused them to reflect on their own sense of values.

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