

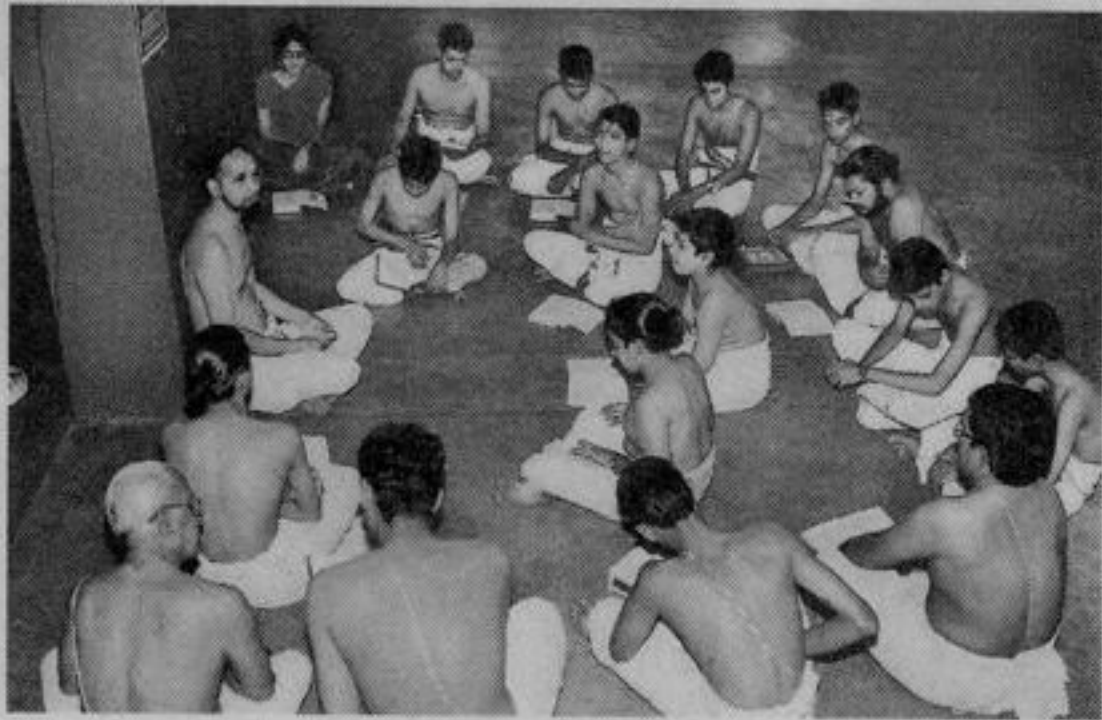
A century of Vedic chanting

"There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness; of night or day there was not any sign; the One breathed without breath, by its own impulse; other than that there was nothing at all."

THUS DECLARES the Naasadiya Sukta or the hymn of creation, found in the Rig Veda. Centuries later, the devotional outpourings of the Azhwars, the Sri Vaishnava saints of South India had a tremendous impact on the people. Most important, they were recognised as the Tamil Vedas. It was to preserve such profound knowledge, encapsulated in Vedic chants in Sanskrit and Azhwar pasurams in Tamil, that a group of Sri Vaishnavas from Mylapore, joined hands in the early part of the twentieth century to form an organisation devoted to Vedic studies.

The Vedaparayana Sabha was inaugurated in 1905 under the auspices of the Sri Vedanta Desika Devasthanam, Mylapore, Chennai. Its objectives were the study and propagation of the Vedas that included the Divya Prabandham of the Azhwars, the philosophy of Visishtadvaita propagated by the great Vaishnava teacher and philosopher Sri Ramanuja, the teachings of his noble descendant, Sri Vedanta Desika and other related subjects.

These were to be achieved by the publication of books and discourses by learned scholars. The Sabha included honouring of Vedic scholars in its activities. It is now gearing itself to celebrate its centenary. It goes to the credit of the Sabha that, in the last hundred years, it has assiduously ensured the daily recitation of both the Sanskrit and Tamil Vedas at the Devasthanam.



Vedaparayanam class in progress...

This is no mean achievement. For, the hurdles and obstacles the sabha faced were not few and it overcame the challenges showing commitment. A devotee, when he enters the temple, in the early hours of the morning, can most certainly witness and hear scores of young boys being taught Divya Prabandham. Vedas are taught when there are enough number of students. The tutoring is absolutely free and the only thing expected of the student is dedication. One of the factors contributing to the success of the Sabha has been its parent organisation, Sri Vedanta Desika Devasthanam. This is a rare example of a temple built in honour of an acharya with Lord Srinivasa and other deities entering its precincts much later. Today, this temple is popularly known as the Mylapore Srinivasa Perumal temple.

Other shrines, in the temple, include separate ones for Alar-melmanga Thayar and Pey Azhwar. The Vedaparayana Sabha undertakes the service of thadeeyaradhana and Sambhavana

(serving of food and offering monetary gifts to Vedic scholars and it has been doing this ever since its inception for a hundred years now).

The centenary celebrations of the Sabha will take place between March 4 and 8. The Sabha has planned a grand five-day festival befitting the occasion. The pujas to be conducted during these days include special Tirumanjanam to Perumal, Thayar and Sri Desika; Veda, Divya Prabandha and Grantha Parayanam on all the five days; laksharchana (8 a.m. and 4 p.m.) discourses by eminent scholars and thadeeyaradhana.

On the concluding day, the Lord and His consort and Sri Desika will be taken out in procession. A commemorative souvenir will be released on the occasion. Donations are welcome. Cheques in favour of Vedaparayana Sabha Centenary Celebration Committee should be sent to Sri Vedanta Desikar Devasthanam, K.P. Sannidhi Street, Mylapore.

LAKSHMI DEVNATH