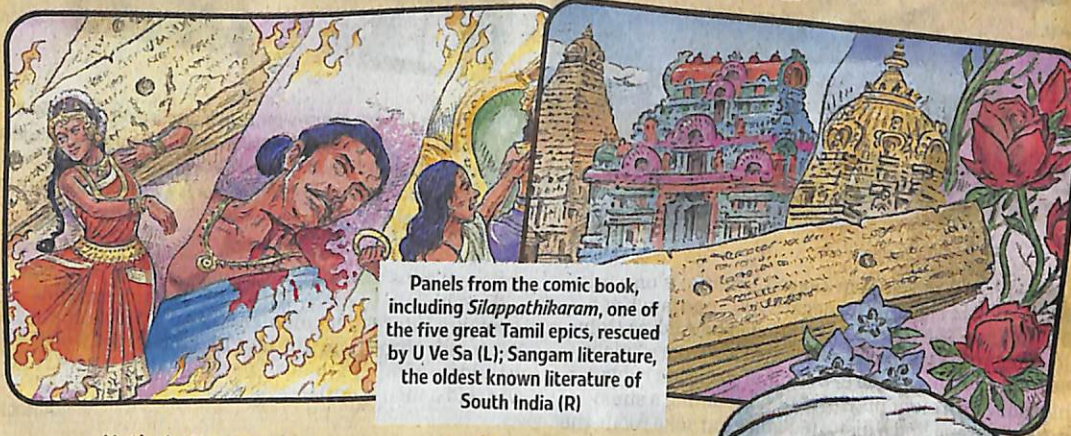


FROM PALM LEAVES TO PANELS:

Tamil Thaatha is now a comic-book figure!



Panels from the comic book, including *Silappathikaram*, one of the five great Tamil epics, rescued by U Ve Sa (L); Sangam literature, the oldest known literature of South India (R)

Kathakali Dutta

A towering figure in Tamil literary history, U Ve Swaminatha Iyer, affectionately known as Tamil *Thaatha*, preserved the *Aimperum Kappiyam* (the five great epics of Tamil literature) and countless ancient texts for future generations through his tireless efforts. Once only read about in history books, his journey and work have now been reimagined in a surprising yet accessible format — a comic book!



Shakthi Bharathi

Praveen Jagarajan

BRINGING TAMIL *THAATHA* TO LIFE ON PAGE

Explaining the creative process behind the comic adaptation of U Ve Sa's life, Shakthi Bharathi, the comic's script writer, says, "People know about his achievements and his work, but we wanted people to know how he was as a person. We wanted to make his journey relatable and accessible without losing the depth of his achievements. Since this understanding begins at childhood, we opted for comics."

'WE WANTED THE VISUALS TO REFLECT THE TIME PERIOD AUTHENTICALLY'

Sharing insights into the meticulous process of creating the comic, led by Reena I Puri and Ritoparna Hazra, Shakthi says, "I wrote the script for the comic as well, for six months, I studied his autobiographies, historical accounts, and interviews with scholars who had analysed his work as it was important to stay true to his life while making the story engaging for readers." The team then collaborated closely with illustrators to bring U Ve Sa's world to life. "We wanted the visuals to reflect the time period authentically — his home, the palm-leaf manuscripts, his iconic blue coat. Every detail had to resonate with his personality and the era he lived in," she explains.

'HE DIDN'T WANT READERS TO STRUGGLE AS HE DID'

While reading the great Tamil epics, U Ve Sa realised that a lot of them lacked continuation of chapters, context, and even texts. So, he walked door to door to ask people if they had any palm-leaf manuscripts of the Tamil epics, says Shakthi. "Imagine having to walk miles and cross rivers to find a single palm-leaf manuscript, or parts of it missing or illegible. That's what U Ve Sa faced while reviving the texts. He spent years painstakingly deciphering, translating, and piecing together ancient Tamil texts that were on the brink of being lost forever. He didn't want readers to face the same struggles he did. That's why he added detailed forewords, glossaries, and



Illustration of U Ve Sa from the comic

The challenge was to honour U Ve Sa's monumental contributions while presenting them in an engaging way for young readers. We researched extensively to ensure accuracy but also worked hard to make the story visually captivating

- Shakthi

'He corresponded with scholars across oceans'

Telling us how U Ve Sa's work wasn't just appreciated in Tamil Nadu but resonated across the world, Shakthi remarks, "He corresponded with global Tamil scholars at a time when communication was slow and difficult. Figures like Reverend GU Pope and Professor Julian Winston in Paris praised his monumental contributions. Even Subramania Bharathi admired his work, and Rabindranath Tagore wrote a Bengali poem dedicated to him. That level of



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The team that brought U Ve Sa to the comic world

"While the comic's cover and art has been done by Harsho Mohan Chatteraj, the colouring has been done by Sanjhiya Mayekar and Srinath Malolan M," informs Shakthi, who adds that Ritoparna Hazra and Savio Mascarenhas were also part of this project.

When a child reads a biography, they should feel like they know the person. That's why we've included small, humanising moments in the comic. For instance, how U Ve Sa sought advice from people regardless of their status or knowledge level

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Seevaga Sinthamani, one of the five great Tamil epics, rescued and published by U Ve Sa



Palm-leaf manuscripts from the Sangam Era, corroding over time