

IFAASD

15th Annual
Music & Dance
FESTIVAL





A Message from the Secretary



Dear Patrons,

Welcome to the 15th Annual Indian Music and Dance Festival! I hope you and your family are doing well. This festival is a special festival as we come from a two-year break due to Covid. We celebrate the musical legacies of Bharat Ratna Ravi Shankar, Padma Bhushan R.K. Srikantan, Padma Bhushan Lalgudi Jayaraman and natya legacy of Padma Bhushan Kalanidhi Narayanan. This year's program will honor artists including Sangita Kalanidhi Chitravina Ravikiran, Guru Neyveli Santhanagopalan, Guru Priyadarsini Govind, and Odissi exponent, Sujata Mohapatra.

Before we leave the two challenging years behind us, here's a recap on what you helped us accomplish:

1. We broadcasted select programs from past festivals on a weekly basis.
2. We started broadcasting on a bimonthly basis a Lecdem series from July of 2020, which was pioneered by Smt. Revathi Subramanian. We had the pleasure of listening to over 40 lecdems in a variety of topics including music and dance.
3. We broadcasted a special concert by Kaushiki Chakraborty.
4. We collaborated with Mohan Foundation, an organ

donation organization in India to stream a number of other events (eg: Warsi Brothers, Aishwarya Srinivas, Shankar Mahadevan Academy, and Usha Uthup to name a few). We also brought a Bollywood program in collaboration with Mohammad Rafi Foundation.

5. We broadcasted concerts that were put together by the Federation of City Sabhas for 2020. These 150 programs featuring 250 artists showcased India's vocal and instrumental music, dance, drama, and namasangeerthanams, These programs were free to IFAASD patrons.

6. We are broadcasting the Federation of Sabhaa concerts as well as the First Edition Arts programs (about 100 concerts) for all IFAASD 2021- 2022 paid subscribers. These unique events include Carnatic (vocal and instrumental) music Hindustani music, as well as dance, dramas and namasangeerthanams.

We are keenly focused on our future together as we celebrate 15 years of adventurous artistic engagement. As we begin to celebrate the past two years of activities, we want to take a moment to send a note of thanks to you. Your active participation in the academy's activities as well as your financial contributions to its growth and development have enabled us to continue to offer quality program during the pandemic

Working closely with the team of many organizers, the IFAASD board's vision for this year's festival was to add unique depth and dimension to the academy's repertoire. For the next three days, our wonderful city of San Diego will become even more popular in Southern California as we host 10 events featuring over 40 artists from India and around the U.S. and over 50 young students of music and dance from San Diego.

The board joins me in inviting you all to thoroughly enjoy high caliber vocal, instrumental, and dance programs throughout the entirety of this grand festival. We greatly appreciate your support and presence at every one of the events scheduled over the next three days. Once more, I'd like to extend a hearty welcome to all of you, and wish you all an enjoyable experience as patrons of the Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego!

Sincerely,

Shekar Viswanathan

Secretary, Indian Fine Arts Academy of San Diego



Sangeeta Acharya Tiruvaiyaru S R Krishnan Guest of Honor

Sangeeta Acharya Tiruvaiyaru S R Krishnan has

been a Vākgēyakāra, Védic scholar, poet, lyricist, composer, journalist, a story writer, and an operatic playwright.

Krishnan was trained in Karnátaka Sangītam by his father Gāna-Bhūshaṇam Brahmasri Kumāramangalam Srinivāsa Rāghavan (KSR), and by many other legends of the 20th Century including Maharājapuram Viswanātha Iyer, Madurai Mani Iyer and G.N. Bala Subramanyam. Krishnan has been performing since 1955 in India, Far East Asia, Europe, Great Britain, and the US, accompanied by well-known artists many of whom are leading names in the Indian Music world. Krishnan is also a celebrated exponent of 'Dakshina-sampradaya-Sankeertanam, Abhang-Sankeertan & Hari-Kathā traditions; he has performed these divine formats encompassing music from both renowned traditions of India. His Gurus for these traditions include Brahmasri KSR, Brahmasri Náthamuni Nārāyaṇa-Iyengar, Abhang Sirónmañi Nārāyaṇa-Sástri, and Swámi Haridoss Giri (renowned as 'Guruji') with whom Krishnan had performed since 1959 until Guruji's passing away in 1990. Krishna's earliest Opera based on three versions of "Rámāyaṇa", titled Sitāyāscaritam-Mahat & Triveni-Ramayana" was staged in 1965. A thespian since his youth, Krishnan had performed in the prestigious Kalidas Festivals in Ujjain to play leading roles in many of Kalidas's famed works. He has hundreds of

live recordings; some of which are available, on-line, and also on two YouTube channels.

A disciple of His Holiness Jagadguru Kanchi Paramāchārya (68th Pontiff of the Adi Sankra Order), Krishnan continued training in the Vedas and scriptures in Sanskrit College, Madras under the auspices of Paramāchārya.

Krishnan with his wife Radha and his daughters/disciples, 'Krishnan-Sisters' – Priya, Harini & Subha, also musicians– are all involved in several philanthropic activities. His performances are mostly fundraisers for Charities and Philanthropy and those live recordings supplement the Krishna's support to charities, Homes for the mentally and physically challenged and hospitals for the underprivileged.

A gold medalist from the University of Madras, India, Krishnan is a Fellow of the Royal Chartered Institute of Bankers (London) and a Fellow of the Institute of Financial Accountants (London) since the 1970s. Krishnan has held top executive positions with several International Banks, in Asia, Europe, Great Britain and the US, and has widely traveled the globe for 50 years. He is the CEO of and Chairmen of two reputed US Fiduciary firms serving at the nomination of US Federal and State Agencies, Regulators, Banks, and Foreign Governments.

He also serves as the Special Deputy Commissioner of California State Department of Financial Protection & Innovation.

Bhadrachala Ramadasu's Legacy and Influence on Saint Tyagaraja and his Compositions

-Thiruvaiyaru S R, Krishnan

Prologue:

About four hundred (400) years ago, Gopanna was born in a remote village near Khammam, in a nondescript family who never dreamt of the spiritual and musical legacy that Gopanna would be leaving behind, for mankind. While most of the historians agree on the year 1620 as his birth year, based on incidents in the Golconda empire at that time, there is no information as to the month, star of date/day of his birth. Some of the books indicate 1627 or 1630 as the likely year of birth while the very Bhadrachalam temple that Gopanna built in the 17th century celebrates the 387th year of Ramadasa-Jayanti in February of 2020 although never mentioning the year of his birth!

Gopanna (who came to be known as Ramadasu as can be seen later in this write up) is believed to have composed about 200 keertanams, but only 160 of them are available in print; Bhajana Sampradáyam devotees¹ have released a list of 383 keertanams with Ragams and talams whereas many of the Telugu publications have listed between 110 to 157 keertanams at best.



Most of the available keertanams have been widely popular not only in Telugu dEsam but also amidst Bhágavata-MéLa & Sankeertana Bhágavatás in the large southern province originally known as "Madras State"². The popularity of these Telugu compositions can be compared with that of the magnum opus, ŚrīRámacaritamánas, in Awadhi, by Goswami Tulsidas in the northern provinces. While the latter work is comparable to the great Epic (Rámáyana of Valmiki) in storytelling, Rámadása-keertanamulu (along with 'Andhra-Pada-kavita-Pitámaha' Annamayyá's³ keertanams) have held sway over the emotions of common man in the southern provinces, as traditional folk poetry extolling the greatness of Rama and Sita.

¹ <http://music.karthiksankar.com/reference/composer/b/Bhadrachalam-ramdas/>

² At the time of its formation in 1950, Madras State (previously known as Karnatakam) included the whole of present-day Tamil Nadu, Coastal-Andhra, Rayalaseema, the Malabar-region of Kerala, and Bellary, South Canara and Udipi districts of Karnataka. Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema were separated to help form Andhra State in 1953, while South Canara and Bellary districts were merged with Mysore State, and Malabar District with the State of Travancore-Cochin to form Kerala in 1956. On January 14, 1969, Madras State was renamed to Tamil Nadu, meaning "Tamil country".

³ Tallapaka Annamacharya (1408-1503), earliest Hindu saint-poet known to have composed songs in 'Keertanam' format (also known as 'annamayya-padams'); the most prolific composer credited with 32,000 keertanams. About 12,000 of them inscribed in copper plates were excavated/discovered in 1922, preserved by Tirupati Devasthanam and after decades of decoding, published in 1998 in 29 volumes.

The earliest (20th century) publication of Rámadásu C`aritra by Venkateswara & Co. (with an introduction by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan⁴) was chronologically corrected/ authenticated through references from an article by the well-known historian, late Bhavaraju Venkata Krishna Rao⁵. Rámadásu's 'Dásarathi Satakam' and his keertanams have become folklore in most of Telugu-dEsam, through Harikatha and Yakshagánas on 'Rámadásu C`aritra', albeit with subtle variations by the eminent presenters such as Yadavadasu of Bhadráchalām and others⁶. In addition, Telugu Rangasthālam (i.e., stage-drama) on Bhakta Rámadásu, of (late) D.V. Gopalachary, has been presented by several great actors from the Indian cinema⁷. The 1964 film 'Rámadásu', not only increased the popularity of Rámadása, but also showcased the role of Sant Kabir through which Kabir's dohas became popular in Andhra dEsam! Numerous 20th century scholars such as Professor Nelaturi Venkataramaniah⁸, Professor Vasumati, K V Bhupala Rao, and Bedam Venkataraya Sastry are to be thanked for additional information⁹ on Rámadásu's life.

This article is an attempt to provide a brief biographical sketch, highlighting some important incidents documented and attributed in his life, which elevated his status as a venerable saint composer in the southern provinces of India. In addition, the influence of his seemingly simple compositions (yet conveying profound concepts) over millions of devotees and Dharma-adherent, directing them to the path of devotion (Bhakti-márga), is described, with special emphasis on the impact of Rámadásu's keertanams on Saint Tyagaraja's life (1767-1847) and compositions.

Background of Bhakti Movement & Evolution of divine poetry

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan traced the origin of 'Bhakti-márga' to the great epics Rámáyana and Mahábhárata. He stated, "....we see in the epics, a gradual modification of the ancient Vedic religion into modern Hinduism when the 'sáktá', the pásupatá' and 'páncarátra' systems (which belong to the Agama Class and thus deemed non-Vedic) enter into the Hindu Religion...."

This was the time when mankind started image/idol worship in temples (arcávatára-murthis), as manifestations of the formless Ultimate. Pilgrimages (to sacred temples enshrining idols) were introduced as essential part of the worship, guiding the path to liberation (realization of the formless Infinite within one's self). All such developments and pursuits came under the large umbrella of the 'Bhakti Movement'. This movement, though proscribed for a religious/ spiritual pursuit of personal life, was influenced and shaped by changing societal norms, recognition for the need for social justice and geopolitical forces.

By the beginning of the current era (CE), millennia-old prejudices had led to caste-related hierarchical and gender-based suppression of learning for the men of lower castes and all women. As awareness of this discriminatory practice developed, Hindus gradually came to believe, based on the affirmations in the puránás, that the Divine pantheon is often reborn, as saints, to rectify the prevailing ignorant notions/ assertion that the 'birth' status alone would bestow upon

⁴ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, one of India's most distinguished twentieth-century scholars of philosophy and comparative religion, was the first Vice President of India (1952-1962) and the second President of India (1962-1967).

⁵ Bhavaraju Rao's article was published in 1925 in 'Bharati', a reputed Telugu literary monthly journal.

⁶ King Kanthirava Narasaraġa II (1674-1714), Gurajada Venkata Apparao (1862), ThirukkaDaiyur Krishna Dasu, Narasimha Dasu and Vara-Rámadásu, to name a few.

⁷ such as Ballari Raghava, Chittoor V Nagaiah, Parvata Reddy, Rama Chandra Reddy, Rentachintala Satyanarayana, CSR Anjaneyulu with Chandur Madhusudan Rao in the title role.

⁸ A great historian born 1883 in Nelaturi of Prakasam district, AP; author of numerous historical research publications and awarded the title 'Mahamanishi' in 1963; passed away in 1977.

⁹ albeit contestable, since lack of authentic and comprehensive publications are usually the common problem when we attempt an objective historical life history of great saints and poets belonging to earlier centuries.

one the privilege of access to Sanskrit language and the scriptural knowledge, mostly written/expressed in Sanskrit. The history of bhakti movement traces the lives and contributions of such saints, most of whom gave immortal compositions to mankind, in scores of languages, soaked in devotion and of literary excellence, specifically to benefit the commoner and all women who had been denied access to ancient Sanskrit scriptures.

Dharma historians believe that between the fifth and eleventh centuries, in the southern provinces of Bharata dEsam, Azwars (The twelve principal devotees of Vishnu, referred to as Vaishnava preceptors) and Nayanmars (devotees of Lord Shiva) reiterated Bhakti as an easy path to Salvation (a concept originally stated in Srimad Bhágavatam¹⁰). They offered their surrender to the Supreme as exquisite poetry, rich in lyrical and musical content, collectively known as Nalayira divya prabhandam (compendium of Azwars' poems) and Tirumurais (Shaivite poetry) respectively. These divine verses, acknowledged to be the quintessence of the eternal Vedas in Tamiz, broke down language barriers and made Vedic and scriptural knowledge, originally in Sanskrit, accessible to the masses, irrespective of birth, creed, gender or caste. The redefining / spread of Bhakti movement in the rest of India was, however, significantly delayed due to frequent incursions in those areas by Mamluk¹¹ dynasty and the successive Islamic rulers that followed them. In the 13th Century, the western provinces witnessed the revival of the Bhakti movement, initiated by the siblings Nivritti, Jnáneshwar, Mukta, and S'opan; these saints with others of the Varakari movement made invaluable contributions to the bhakti movement in the form of exquisite Marati poetry called Abhangs¹². The advancement of Bhakti movement in Eastern India is attributed to Jayadeva (12th C) and 15th Century poets Chandidas, Vidyapati¹³ and saint Sri Krishna Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, known as the father of modern Sankeertanam.

From the 15th century, Purandara-dása, and his disciples from central India composed divine compositions in Kannada and Sanskrit. Goswami Tulsidás, Sant Surdás, Meera, Kabir, Brahmánand, Kálasa-Saheb, Narsi-Mehta, and others from the Northern provinces gave remarkable gems in Hindusthani and its dialects¹⁴; all the above compositions were directed towards and available to the common men and women of the society. The Southernmost region now known as Tamil Nadu witnessed hundreds of saint composers since the 17th century who offered thousands of brilliant pieces of musical poetry. Bhodendra Satguru, Sridhara-VenkaTesa, MarudAnallUr Satguru SwamigaL, Sri Sadáshiva Brahmendrâ, Sri Narayana teertha, the Karnataka Sangita Trinity (Shyámá Shastri, Tyágarája and Mudduswámi Dikshitar) are some of the household names.



¹⁰ *Bhakti-yoga sádhana: In the Srimad Bhagavata and the Vishnu Purana it is told that the nine forms of Bhakti are Sravana (hearing of God's Lilas and stories), Kirtana (singing of His glories), Smarana (remembrance of His Name and presence), Padasevana (service of His feet), Archana (worship of God), Vandana (prostration to the Lord), dásyá (cultivating the Bhava of a servant with God), Sakhya (cultivation of the friend-Bhava) and Atmanivedana (complete surrender of the self). A devotee can practise any method of Bhakti which suits him best. Through that he will attain Divine illumination.*

¹¹ *Mamluk was also known as slave dynasty or Gulham dynasty (1206-1290), the first of the five dynasties which invaded and occupied huge territories of northern India (1206-1526). Barring some exceptions, these rulers plundered, looted and attempted to eradicate the ancient Dharmic culture and divine traditions and establish a Moghul empire that would eradicate all cultural traces of ancient Bharat.*

¹² *abhanga (अभंग) or "abhang" means "non-ending" or "non-interrupting"; in other words, a flawless, continuous process, a poem. By contrast, the devotional songs known as Bhajans focus on the inward journey. Abhangs are more exuberant expressions of the communitarian experience. Abhanga is considered a form of the ovi.*

¹³ *Vidyapati (1352-1448), also known by the sobriquet Maithil Kavi Kokil (the poet cuckoo of Maithili), was a Maithili and Sanskrit poet, writer and polyglot.*

¹⁴ *Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Bundeli, Chhattisgarhi, Garwali, Kurmali, Magahi, Nagpuri, Rajasthani are some of the major dialects.*

History of Telugu Sankeertanam and Bhadráchalam

"Songs" have invariably been the vehicle of spiritual expression for all the saint poets of Bhārat (India). They invariably influenced the listeners with their emotional and of course melodic appeal. This was the genesis of Bhakti-mārga for the less-initiated and common man and the Dharma- adherent to be in tune with the Infinite or the Supreme Power (aka God). Elevating such 'songs' from mundane pastime, Annamayya¹⁵ made his more than 32,000 eternal gems in Telugu and Sanskrit suitable for presentation by both the elite and the common man both in the royal courts and temple halls. Annamayya's successors, lyrical poets from four generations, were fortunate to be patronized by the rulers of Vijayanagar empire until its fall in 1565. But, northern and western districts of Andhra dEsam and most of the northern states of India were coming under increasing influence by Sufi poetry through Persian poets¹⁶ singing Qawwalis on formless Almighty. Fortuitously, the Bhakti poetry of Swami Ramanand, Kabir, Guru Nanak and Anand Chidghan had continued patronage from common masses, while the appeal of keertanams was dwindling.

In early seventeenth century, a pious lady known as Tammala Dammakka living in the wilderness near Bhadráchalam¹⁷, was believed to have constructed, at the direction of Sri Rama in her dreams, a humble hut and a canopy on the hill, to cover the pre-existing idols of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita.

The devotees maintain that Dammakka was assured by Sri Rama that a young man would follow her efforts, soon, to finish a formal construction of a temple and take up the responsibilities of daily and formal worship. The state records indicate that around 1650 Kancherla Gopanna, a young revenue officer in the employ of the Qutub Shahi Sultan(s) of Golkonda kingdom (and who was also believed to be an ardent devotee of Sri Rama) started organizing formal worship of the idols and improving the structure and housing.

Historical background of Golkonda Empire and Gopanna's family

Golkonda, one of the glorious cities of medieval Deccan of India, rose to prominence (after the decline of Gulbarga, the seat of Central Government of the Bahmani Empire), attracting traders, travelers and chroniclers from Europe and the Middle East. Famous for its rich mineral resources, especially diamonds like the Kohinoor, Golkonda was an object of envy and vulnerable and thus was subjected to looting and threats from the imperial Mughals led by Shahjahan and Aurangzeb of Delhi. These rulers, successful in robbing the material wealth of the region were, however unable to make a dent the spiritual riches of all people from different faiths, nurtured through seven generations of well-documented benevolent rule of Qutub Shahi monarchs practicing religious tolerance and non-discriminating, meritocracy-based hiring practices in the various arenas including political offices. Malik Ibrahim Qutub Shah used to hold frequent

¹⁵ Tallapaka annamacarya (is popularly known as Annamayya) is believed to be the first known Indian musician to compose in Karnataka Sangltaṁ (now called Carnatic Music thanks to anglicization) in a genre now established as sankeertanas in praise of Tirupati Venkateswara, the Lord of the seven hills. The most famous composers of Karnataka Sangltaṁ such as Purandara Dasa, Kanaka Dasa and a hundred others came after Annamayya. The musical form of the keertanas that he composed have strongly influenced the structure of Karnataka-sangita compositions. Annamacharya is remembered as a saint and believed to be an avatara of Nandaka, the sword of Mahavishnu. As mentioned elsewhere, he was widely regarded as the Andhra-Pada-kavita-Pitamaha.

¹⁶ Khwaja Nijamuddin Chishti, Baba Fariduddin, Nijamuddin Auliya, and the famous Amir Khusro, the royal poet of the Khalji Sultan of Delhi.

¹⁷ As per the description in Gautami Mahátmyam in the BrahmánDa Purana (under an exclusive chapter styled 'Bhadráchala Mahatmyam'), Soota Maharishi extols to maharishi Saunaka that the hill on which Lord Rama camped with Sita and Lakshmana, during Ramayana period, became known as 'Bhadra, the unmoving (or Bhadráchalam)'. Rama fulfilled Bhadra's desire by manifesting himself on that hill and assuring salvation to visiting pilgrims until the final deluge of this Creation. Bhadráchalam, which is a part of the Khammam district of the present-day Telangana state of India, was originally part of the Kakatiya Empire but was ceded to the Sultanate of Delhi and later gifted to Annappa Rahut Aswarao in 1424.

literary durbars inviting Telugu and Parsi poets with equal reverence. Telugu was accepted and honored as one of the official languages of the Qutub Shah government for administration along with Persian and Urdu. The marriages of Ibrahim Qutub Shah and his son to Hindu women (and the mutual respect and love of the partners in those relationships) were simultaneously indicative of and responsible for heightened tolerance and peaceful coexistence of the two major religious communities. *Quli* constructed a magnificent new city, called 'Bhagayanagar' at a distance of eight miles from Golkonda in honor of his beloved queen Bhagmathi, *which later became the city of Hyderabad.*

Akkanna and Madanna, sons of Bhanujayya Pantulu of Hanumakonda, accomplished scholars in Sanskrit and Telugu, Persian, Arabic and Marathi and well versed in Sastras were taken into service of Qutub Shahi Administration during the reign of the sixth ruler, King Abdullah. Most of the historians agree that Akkanna and Madanna faithfully supported the freedom of Golkonda Empire and the welfare of the Sultan of Golkonda even after Sultan Abdullah was defeated by Aurangzeb's forces from Delhi. Pleased by their loyalty and exemplary administration abilities, the last of Qutub Shahis, Abul Hasan, made Madanna the Prime Minister, and Akkanna the Commander of the Golkonda Army (after removing the disloyal Muslim courtiers from those posts).

Gopanna becomes Bhakta Rámadásu (aka Bhadráchala-Rámadása)

Gopanna, born to Kancherla Linganna Mantri of Nelakondapalli¹⁸ and Kamamma (sister of Madanna and Akkanna as aforesaid) in 1620, had a spiritual bent of mind from childhood. He learnt Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Parsi and Urdu in addition to Vedic scriptures. Following the family tradition, Gopanna was initiated into the ashTAKshari mantra (in praise of Lord Narayana) by Raghunatha Bhattar. Though Gopanna used to meditate on Narayana Japam, Gayatri Japam and other scriptures, from a very young age his hero was Sri Rama. One of Gopanna's earliest compositions, at a tender age of 10, was the famous song

*'takkuvemi manaku ramuDokkaDumDu varaku'*¹⁹.

There are 13 stanzas in this keertanam (sung in Saurashtra rAgam) citing 'Puranic stories and incidents' in one-liners with fine (Telugu) grammar and imagination. He states in the song 'when Narayana takes care of his (Narayana) dAsas', why should we worry? He asserts his belief by using the word 'Rámadásunila' mudra in the last stanza. Almost all his keertanams hold the signature (mudra) 'Rámadása' or 'Rámadásulu' skillfully woven into the lyrics in a most appropriate and beautiful manner. Gopanna's routine included the penance of 'Rámakoti' or writing the Lord Rama's name one crore (or ten million) times, while continuing to entertain devotees, pilgrims and mendicants and not swerving from the routine of austerities stipulated for 'Rámakoti'. It is believed that Gopanna lost both his parents before he turned twenty and was married to Kamala as arranged by the elders of the village. His charitable way of life soon made him poor, dependent on 'Oonchavritti' for the family's subsistence. Unmindful of his poverty, Gopanna's desire to celebrate the birthday of Sri Rama at Bhadráchalam became uncontrollable. He went to his uncles Madanna and Akkanna (stationed in Hyderabad, about 120 miles away) singing the praise of Sri Rama. The famous Yakshagana titled 'Rámadásu C'aritra' mentions that Gopanna met with the then ruler, 'Tanisha' in the company of Madanna and Akkanna. The time period was around 1650 when Gopanna was about 30 years old and the Golkonda Empire was ruled by Sultan Abdullah Qutub Shah.

¹⁸ *Nelakondapalli, an unassuming Telangana village in Bhadráchalam Taluk in the Khammam District.*

¹⁹ *'Is there any want or unfulfilled desire when the one (and only) Sri Rama is with us?'*

²⁰ *The historians of Yakshagana affirm that Gopanna had a son early in his married life*

These facts appear to contradict historical notes²¹ subsequently unearthed helping reconstruct the C`aritrnam of Gopanna. As per this, Gopanna was appointed as Tehsildar at Bhadráchalam in 1650 when Abdulla Qutub Shah was the Sultan.

The happy Gopanna returns to Bhadráchalam singing the famous " ídigo bhadrádri gautami adigō cūḍanDi (->here is Bhadradi...there is Gautami²²)..".

The historians report that hundreds of devotees of Sri Rama followed him singing the chorus. Gopanna became a favorite of the people and also earned the admiration of the Shahi administration. During a festival, Gopanna and his wife organized a feast for the Vedic scholars and devotees as part of the austerities. When they were busily engaged in hospitality, their small child crawled and fell into a pot of boiling gruel. Gopanna and his wife, desiring not to interrupt their services to the guests ignored the child until the services were completed. Only after the services were completed, they ran to Lord

Sri Rama's idol, with the limp child in their arms, crying and lamenting,

"kOdamDarAma-
kOdamDarAma²³;
nIdamDanAku nIvendubOku
vAdEla niku vaddu parAku".

The child woke up, as if from slumber, much to their happiness, surprise and relief, and as a testament to their faith.

This was a major turning point in Rámadásu's life, as all the citizens of Bhadráchalam started addressing him as 'Rámadásu (servant of Rama)', a term of honor and sign of reverence. This miracle out of an accident or an accident of a miracle had increased the yearning in Rámadásu's heart, to get one of his childhood dreams fulfilled (in which Rama appeared and told him that Gopanna would be raising a temple for him at Bhadrágiri (Bhadráchalam).

Appreciating the good work of Gopanna as the new Tehsildar of Bhadráchalam, in 1652, the emperor Abdulla approved the sanction of Sultan's annual grants for the maintenance of the shrine of Sri Rama of Bhadrágiri. Sultan Abdulla's

firman (order) declaring Bhadráchalam and Rekapalli as Jágīrs to Sri Rama's shrine had been inscribed on a stone-slab displayed, even today, inside the temple. At the constant requests/urging, from the devotees and the Hindu agriculturist landlords of the area, Rámadásu began construction of the temple at Bhadrágiri. By the time the sacred enclosures for the main deities and the sub-deities were completed, the funds proffered by Rámadásu and leaders of the people were exhausted, and the Agama-rite-proscribed sanctification and decoration of the main deities could not be completed.



²¹ *Tanisha means a 'benevolent king' or a leader always found in 'bliss', i.e., in tune with the Infinite or the Supreme. This accolade was believed to have been more used for 'Abul Hasan Tanesha' the seventh and the last of the monarchs of Qutub Shahi (Sultans) line of Golkonda Empire, who ascended the throne in 1672 after the demise of his father-in-law Sultan Abdulla Qutub Shah (who was reigning between 1626 and 1672). When Gopanna came to Hyderabad in 1650, it is believed by the historians, Abdulla Qutub Shah was the ruler and could not have met Gopanna when Madanna and Akkanna were lower level officials in the revenue department under the Prime Minister Mirjumla, Mirza Sayyad. It is believed that his uncles must have impressed the Mirjumla to appoint Gopanna as Tehsildar of Bhadráchalam and Palavancha.*

²² *River Godhavari, At Rajamahendravaram, the Godavari splits into two branches which are called Vriddha Gautami (Gautami - Godavari) and Vasishta Godavari. Puranic lore credits the origin of river Godhavari @ Nasik to Sage Gautama and hence the name Gautami.*

²³ *Of the 22 stanzas in this song, historians place emphasis on the 20th stanza "vandanamayya vAdElanayya danDanasEya tagadu mlkayya" - 'O Rama, I prostrate unto you; why punish me...it is not befitting your stature!'. It is believed that the child came alive, rising as though from sleep.*

²⁴ *Meant a 'feudal land grant' introduced during Islamic rule since 13th century in the subcontinent.*

The Telugu historians aver that Rámadásu followed the voice of the Lord in his dreams²⁵, and utilized 600,000 gold coins (tax collection funds owed to the Government treasury) for completing the renovation, reconstruction and *Sanctification ceremonies*.

Ironically, when all around the periphery of the Shahi empire, iconoclasts in the service of Aurangazeb and the rulers in Deccan were destroying ancient Hindu idols and temples and plundering, Rámadásu completed the monumental temple for Sri Rama in the heart of Qutub Shahi Kingdom! Already under great pressure to pay huge taxes to the (Delhi) Moghul rulers, the Shahi, after conferring with Madanna and Akkanna (who remained impartial and just), the Sultan punished Rámadásu with incarceration and solitary confinement for twelve years (1665-1677), when even the extra time permitted for returning the (misappropriated) funds lapsed.

Rámadásu expresses his anguish, desperation and misery from the Cave-jail in spontaneous outpouring of emotional poetry. Let us see some of those songs in the following sections. Rámadásu sang the glory of Sri Rama, while dealing with the extreme hardship on a daily basis, mostly praising HIM, and the names, attributes, and achievements of the Lord's incarnations; these songs were essentially entreaties from a destitute devotee to the primordial Supreme Lord, revealing the devotee's fathomless and unshaken Faith.

- 'eTubOtiV O rAma eTubOtiV O rAma...(in Ananda-bhairavi ragam) Where have you gone O Rama (while I am crying for your grace, when I want to see you with my eyes...). The song goes further to explain the dungeon of darkness and the stigma of his imprisonment...(aMdhakAramuvaMTi baMdhikaNalO nunna | nindala neDabApu neeku mrokkeda svAmi). ".....Tanisha²⁶ will come for an inquiry and pass judgment, soon, please send the indebted money to him soon to get my release! (tAnIshAgAru vacci sari tlrpu jEseru | pannula paikamu baMpi baMdiKhAnA vadiliMcu.
- Rámadásu's anguish is in full display in the agitated mood of this song, "...Oh..Rama, I thought that you are my master-protector! What have I done to merit your punishment like this? Is there anyone else capable of protecting me? It appears that there is no compassion for me! ["rakShiMcE doravani nammiti nannu|SikShiMpaga tappEmi cEsitini // rakShiMpa mlkaMTE rakShaku-levarunnAru | dAkShiNya miMtaina talapuna nuMcavu //]...the desperate Rámadásu challenges and admonishes Sri Rama in the next few stanzas questioning why HE takes care of the worst of sinners, with compassion for all, irrespective of whether they are humans or Gods, and why Ramadasu alone was chosen to go through such torture.

At the intervention of Madanna, and as directed by the benevolent Sultan Abdulla, his son-in-law and heir-apparent Prince Abul Hasan (whom Rámadásu refers in his song as Tanisha), gives one more opportunity to Rámadásu in 1669 to explain the misappropriation of government funds for temple construction. An emotional and gullible Rámadásu questions Tanisha 'I thought Sri Rama is more powerful than all in this world and whatever I spent was spent on the Omnipotent Rama. This temple would help you get your good name in the history'. Frustrated Tanisha gives him one more week and puts him back in the dungeon after that.

Back in the cave-jail, Rámadásu asks Sri Rama in the famous song,

"... ikshvAku-kula tilaka ika naina balukavu rAmachandra nannu rakshimpa kunnanu rakshakulevarinka rAmachandra [Raga – kambhoji]

"....Oh Ramachandra, the noblest person of Ikshvaku dynasty, if you don't protect me, who else is there for me?"

²⁵ Scholars dispute this version of "prompting by the Lord" and explain the aberration as the hasty action by the overzealous Ramadasu.

²⁶ The 'Tanisha' referred to here is 'Tanasha', Prince Abul Hasan, the heir apparent representing his father-in-law Sultan Abdulla Qutub Shah (since his wedding to Sultan's daughter in 1660).

The fourteen stanzas that follow literally summarizes the beautiful construction in detail, as though he is giving a list of itemized expenses. Râmadâsu seeks Rama's pardon for the omissions and commissions. The admonishing and the indignant questioning in this song (as shown below) are explained by Râmadâsu as the result of the torture that is unbearable...Râmadâsu believed with absolute faith that Sri Rama would arrange to pay back and extricate him from the torture! In spite of years of agony and endless torture, frustration and disappointment, it is amazing that he never lost the hope and faith in his Rama. However, momentary mood of desperation brought about arguments and admonishing in the form of the following songs:

- "...rAmA nlcE nEmigAdugA | sItA BhAmakaina cepparAduga sAmAnyulu nannu sakala bAdhalu beTTa - nA morAlakiMci nI mOmaina jUpavEmi

[O Rama, you are not capable of doing anything (despite my pleas)! Can't you tell your wife Sita (since) you don't listen or show your face?

The song goes further admonishing Rama as though a friend in distress would show his annoyance and anger!

At this stage, Râmadâsu's frustration pushes him to ignore Rama and plead directly to Sita or Sitamma.

- "...janaka tanaya nAdu manavigaikoni | jagajjanakunitO telpavE O janani panibUni nanu beTTu bAdhalanniyunu | pâTiMci mahilessagâ O janani

[O (King) Janaka's daughter, I pray, pass my prayer to the father of the Universe (Sri Rama). "...I have taken all the torture I could with patience, day and night for 12 years; (you also know that) I prayed and praised you in many ways, many times but you would not see me. Please bring the money to bail me out or I shall give up my life to join you).

- Râmadâsu pleads for protection in "EDanunnâDO, Bhadrâdri vâsuDu",
- admonishes and scolds in "O Raghuvlrâyani, pilacitE, OhOyana râdâ",
- pleads with Sitamma "...Sita, neevu jeppalEdugâ – SriramulatOnu"
- solicits Sita's help for her recommendation to Sri Rama, "nanubrOvamani c`eppavE, Seetamma talli...nanubrOva..",
- directly confronts Rama, admonishing him that it is not proper for anyone to betray confidence, "nammina vâri ni mOsamu jEsEdi, nyâyamu kâdurA, nâ tanDri.." & " ayyayO...nlvamTi anyAya deivamu neyyaDa gânanayya"
- Finally, falls flat and apologizes in the kAmbhoji keertanam, "AnabeTTitinani AyAsa paDavaddu | rAmacaMdra bhAnuvamsa tilaka batimAlu koniyeda|rAmacaMdra



.....
²⁷ (i) I got the ramparts around the temple built, spending ten thousand varahaalu (money denomination), O Ramachandra. (ii) I got the pavilions built in the towers. Please don't treat me as a stranger. Protect me, O Ramachandra. (iii) I offered an emerald medallion to Bharata, spending ten thousand varahalu, O Ramachandra. (iv) I presented a gold belt to Satrughna, spending ten thousand mOarilu (denomination of money), O Ramachandra. (v) I presented a beautiful pearl medallion to Lakshmana spending ten thousand varahaalu, O Ramachandra.

(21) (vi) I offered a valuable ornament to Mother Sita, costing ten thousand varahaalu, O Ramachandra.

(vii) I presented vahanas (vehicles) to each one of you, but my legs are chained, O Lord that entices the whole universe. (viii) I presented you a pretty and glittering plume with which you go about in all pride. Do you think you inherited all this treasure?

(ix) Did emperor Dasaratha, your father, present you with all these ornaments? Or, did emperor Janaka, your father-in-law send them to you, O Ramachandra?

(x) Pardon me, don't be weary. I blamed you because I was not able to bear the torture, O Ramachandra.

(xi) My life has become useless like the water sprinkled on a river. I became worse than the most downtrodden, O Ramachandra.

(xii) I didn't consider that the government money was so precious, while spending it for you. Now, I cannot bear the lashes anymore. Redeem me from this debt, O Ramachandra.

(xiii) O son of Dasaratha and Kausalya, you established yourself well in Bhadrâchalam. Please save me.

(xiv) O Ramachandra, you are the savior of all devotees. Please protect and take care of Sri Rama dâsu.

During the last week of the 12-year jail term, Rámadásu cries,

- ".... muccaTaina²⁸ nADavEmirA
kOdaMDapANi | muccaTaina nADavEmirA
||

This song was reportedly composed in 1677 and Tanasha (or Tanisha) referred to in the song is the last monarch Sultan Abdul Hasan Tanesha who appointed Madanna as the prime minister and Akkana as the chief of army. There is also documentary evidence that Tanesha was getting acquainted with all affairs of the state and was inclined favorably to adjudicate and revise Rámadásu's sentence.

There were about 75 songs, or about half of his available compositions that historians and yakshagana writers claim that Rámadásu sang from his cave-jail, over the twelve years of solitary confinement. Many of them could be classified under 'nindā-stuti'²⁹ (The Sanskrit word 'ninda' means "abuse, blame or sarcasm." Stuti means "adulation, praise." Putting these two together, Indologist William Jackson³⁰ called it a "song of praise, by way of sarcasm" (History of India- Pp367). Due to space constraints, this article touched only a select few. The Rationalists' view (as per writings of Arudra and Vedam Venkatarayasastri on Rámadásu) was that prime minister Madanna intervened and appealed to Sultan for leniency – after all Rámadásu had spent 12 years of rigorous imprisonment – and exoneration. Since Sultan was favorably inclined and felt that justice had been served, released Rámadásu.

Hawart & Martin, two Dutch historians belonging to the Dutch East India Company had a different analysis and thus wrote, ".....Sultan's Government had appointed a Hindu devotee as Tehsildar of Bhadráchalām who spent huge amounts from the government treasury to construct a temple for his God Ramachandra. Most of those funds went towards precious jewelry and stones for the Lord and other idols. Government imprisoned and tortured him for the misappropriation of public funds. The Lord Ramachandra paid the funds back and got the tehsildar Gopanna released from prison in 1677." It is to be noted that Hawart & Martin did not mention anything about Madanna's intervention but unequivocally described the case of 'release of Gopanna' as a case of 'Divine Intervention'.



²⁸ "why don't you talk intimately with me Rama, O master archer. It is almost 12 years since I got here (in this dungeon) with my body being almost eaten by bugs and mosquitoes; the heat of Caitrā-vāishākām (April/May) is impossible to describe. Tanisha is coming soon to audit my collections and expenditures; I pray you send me the cash and get me released".

²⁹ Grammarians also contend that a nindā-stuti is a shlésha-kāvya (a literary composition laden with double entendre).

³⁰ Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson, (1862-1937), American scholar of the Indo-Iranian languages whose grammar of Avestan, the language of the sacred literature of Zoroastrianism, and Avesta Reader (1893) have served generations of students. Jackson, a teacher from the Columbia University, while @ sabbatical in Europe, continued his studies in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Avestan, to produce his noted work An Avesta Grammar compared with Sanskrit (1892). His other noted book was the 'History of India (1906)'.

³¹ The English founded the East India Company in 1600, and the Dutch followed in 1602 by founding the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie). The VOC established itself in Jakarta, Japan, being the only foreign company allowed to trade there, and along the Malabar Coast in India, removing the Portuguese, in Sri Lanka, at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, and throughout Asia. The company was highly successful until the 1670s [Rise and fall of the largest Corporation in history – by Bryan Taylor, GFD].

All the traditional Telugu writers supported the version of testimony by the foreign writers, and all the Yakshagana composers wrote that Rama and Lakshmana disguised as “servants of Rámadásu”, paid the six lakhs gold-mohurs³² to Tanesha³³ in his palace chamber, at midnight, and got the release of Rámadásu with a demanded receipt obtained from Tanesha containing his Mohar (or a Stamp of his Signet Ring). Rámadásu returned to Bhadráchalam as the revered Tehsildar and also taking care of the temple with the Sultan’s official grants under a Firman. This happiness did not last long for the happy citizens of Bhadráchalam. In 1686, Aurangzeb got Akkanna and Madanna brutally assassinated, ravaged the Golconda Fort and captured Sultan Abul Hasan Tanesha.

Bhadráchala Rámadásu’s compositions, an overview:

From the time Gopanna was very young, to the stage where he came to be known as Rámadásu, he was very firm in his belief that ‘námasádhanam’ is the only method to attain

self-realization. Like Samarth Ramdas in Maharashtra, Goswami Tulsidas in Uttar-Pradesh, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu from Bengal, Bodhendra Saraswati (17th c) from Tamil Nadu, Rámadásu sang scores of songs on ‘náma-prabhávam’, ‘Rama-náma-siddhántam’ and almost all of them have become integral to Sankeertana paddati: Some examples are:

- *AnaMda mAnaMdamAyenu SrljAnakirAma smaraNacEyaganE (nádanamam or Purvikalyani)*
- *antá rámamayambī -jagamantá rámamayam (Varali or PantuvaraLi)*
- *Bhajare Sriramam manasa, bhajare raghuramam – Kalyani*
- *deena dayALo (sung in Bhairavi or Arabhi or simhendramadhyamam)*
- *ennagAnu rAma bhajanakannamikilunnada - PantuvaraLi*
- *Emayya rAma, brahmendrAduluku*
- *nAmabhajare anisam – madhyamAvati*
- In “O Rama, nee nAmam entaruchirA (Purvikalyani), he beckons everyone to realize the importance of nâma-smaran`am.

Rámadásu also teaches, by a dozen or more songs, the ordinary, uninitiated and illiterate common man, most abstract philosophy in simplest of terms. He emphasizes that one does not need to know or pursue complex Sastras and need not resort to difficult Yogas but can easily become ‘tapasvi’ or ‘great yogi’ if he/she has compassion and love towards all creatures in this world and reaches the desireless state! In the process, he admonishes those who sanctimoniously preach piety but do not share, give, or show compassion. He criticizes those who show off doing complex religious ceremonies but have no heart to feed the poor and admonishes such hypocrisy in the strongest of terms. Some of these popular songs are powerful lessons for the society. He questions the mortals, “why do you struggle in the Bhava-bandham perennially, how many births without ‘Harinâma-smaraNam’, how do you get manas-sánti (quietude and tranquility) without vairâgya?

³² The Metallic currency, “mohur coin” was first introduced by Sher Shah Suri during his rule in India between 1540 and 1545 - was then a gold coin weighing 169 grains (10.95 grams) almost equivalent to one Rupia, the unit of currency introduced by Sher Shah. Hindus denoted those as ‘varáhans’ although inaccurate since the standard unit of coin issued by the Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1646) was the gold Pagoda in English or Varáhá weighing 3.4 grams of gold.

³³ Pauranikas (historians) aver that the Sultan, in his previous birth, was a devout follower of Lord Shiva and had promised to perform Rudra-abhishekham to Lord Shiva for 365 days after which he was convinced that Lord Shiva would appear before him. While the Sultan performed the abhishekham but erroneously (only) for 364 days thinking that he had completed 365 days. On the 365th day, enraged that the Lord did not appear, he broke the lingam into several pieces, upon which the Lord appeared and made the Sultan realize his mistake. As punishment, the Lord ordained that the Sultan, in his next birth, will be born as a non-follower; but, as a reward for his having performed austere prayers dedicatedly for 364 days, Lord Rama himself will appear before him and bless him. Hence the appearance of Rama and Lakshmana in his palace.

Some of the songs with such philosophical import and admonition are:

- *BhaLira vairâgyaMeMtO bâgai yunnadi caM- | calamaina nAmanasu niScalamai yunnadE*
- *ennenni janmamulettavalayunO | ElAgu tâLudu O rAma*
- *ayyayyO nEDella ljlunaku suKa- | meyyeDa lEdugadâ râmayya*
- *ayyayyO nE nEranaitini | AdinârayaNuDani deliyanaitini*

Râmadâsu's influence on Tyagaraja and his compositions:

Saint Tyagaraja (1767-1847), who was born (87 years after Râmadâsu) in TiruvârUr, Tamil Nadu, about 600 miles south of Bhadrâchalam, refers to Râmadâsu as his mentor and preceptor and feels proud to be a 'dâsan or servant' of Râmadâsu. The profound descriptions by Râmadâsu of Sri-Rama Saundaryam (physical beauty), praise-worthy characteristics of Rama, anecdotal references, similes & metaphors have all been generously borrowed by Saint Tyagaraja with repeated acknowledgement of his reverence to his mentor.

- At the start of '*Prahlâda Bhakti Vijayam*', Tyagaraja salutes Vishvaksena, Saraswati, Narada Guru, Tulasidasa, Purandara dasa and specifically Râmadâsu:

*"kali yugamuna vara bhadrâcalamuna nelakonna râma candruni pada
bhaktulakella varuDanu-andagi velasina Srl râma dâsu
vinutintu madin*

I extol, in my mind, Srl râma dâsa who, beautifully shines as the foremost of all devotees of the holy feet of Lord Srl rAma-candra abiding in the blessed bhadrâcala (kshetra) in the kali-yuga.

- In the famous divya nâma klrtnam (in dhanyasi raga), "*Srl râma dâsa dâsOham-ana - nIraja nEtra nIkEla sandEhamu*", Tyagaraja asks, "when I declare I am the slave of the slave of Rama,

Why do you doubt it?... O, lotus eyed one"

The eleven stanzas that follow are a delight of the Bhâgavatas conducting divya-nama-sankeertanam in the tradition of Saint Tyagaraja.

- In the Keeravani kriti, '*kaligiyuNTE kadA kalgunu - kAmîta phala dAyaka*,

Tyagaraja is in a self-critical mood, "Isn't it that (kadA), only if I had been endowed (kaligiyuNTE) (with good fortune), it would happen (kalgunu)? But, in the CharaNam, he effusively praises great sages and Bhâgavatas, "sages nArada, prahlAda, parASara, and Râmadasa (and others) (Râmadâsulu), as (BhâgavatagrEsarulagu), the most eminent of the devotees of Rama.

1) Then, there are kritis of Tyagaraja that followed not only the sentiments or BhaAva but also the phrases and structural constructions of Râmadâsu keertanams.

- "*inta saukhyamani nE jeppa jAla.....(kApi raga kriti) – Charanam goes like this:
svara rAga laya sudhA rasamadu -
vara rAma nAmamanE kaNDa
cakkerâ miSramu jEsi bhujincE -
Sankaruniki telusunu tyAgarAja
vinuta (inta)...*

*[yati viSrama sad-bhakti – virati]
drAkshA rasa nava rasa
yuta kRticE bhajiyincu - yukti
tyAgarAjuni taramA - Srl rAma
(sogasuga mRdanga tALamu)*

Let us now compare these songs/ sentiments with Râmadâsu's timeless composition:

- "O Rama, nee nAmamu enta ruchirA.."

"...drAkshA-rasamu

kannanikshurasamu kannâ...

pakSivAha nI nAmam entarucirA
sadAshivuDumadi sadA bhajincEDI
sadAnanda nAmam emirucirA

2) Râmadâsu's "ananya-bhakti-prabhAvam' in "Sri Ramula Divya-nAmam"

- tAraka Srl rAma nAma dhyAnamu jEsina jAlu vEru daivamulanu veduka nETikE manasA is enjoyed by Tyagaraja and phrases repeated as hereunder:
- "tAraka nAmamutOnu velasina (vADERA daivamu manasA) and,

3) Râmadâsu says in his keertanam on nAma-prabhavam,

- "O narulArA cEDI poyyedaru nAmasAra merugaka mlru
- teliyalEka anyâ tirthAlu yAtralu nenduku Suka SAstramu telusukOka"
- which Tyagaraja echoes as under, in his kriti 'kOTi nadulu' in tODi ragam.
- "kOTi nadulu dhanushkOTiOn(u) NDaga - ETiki tirigedavE O manasA

4) **Let us look at Rámadásu pallavi and Tyagaraja Pallavi – some samples:**

- Rámadásu – “enduku kriparAdu Sri Rama’ – Anandabhairavi
Tyagaraja – “enduku daya rAdurA Srl rAmacandra”- tODi
- Rámadásu – “eTiki daya rAdurA nApaina’ – MukhAri
Tyagaraja – “Ela nI daya rAdu parAku” – aTANA

5) **Let us look at bhAvam and construction:**

- Rámadásu – “ mRdanga tALamu celanga tamburu SRti sangati pogaDu
anurAgamuna keertanalu pADu-cunna
- Tyagaraja – “sogasugA mRdanga tALamu jata kUrci ninu
sokka jEyu dhIruD(e)vvaDO

6) **Both were delighted in singing the ‘dasAvatAram’ of “Sri Rama”!!**

- Rámadásu – “takkuvEmi manaku rAmunDokkaDunDuvaraku” – dasAvatAra-keertanam
- Tyagaraja – “deena-janAvana Sri Rama” – divya-nama-keertanam - dasAvatAram

7) **Both plead to ‘Sitamma/Sita Devi’ to recommend to Sri Rama for intervention!**

Note the expressions and sentiments!

- Rámadásu – “IOkAntaranguDu SrlkAnta ninu gUDi EkAntamunanEka Sayyanunna vELa, nanu
brOvamani ceppavE sItamma nanu brOvamani ceppavE
- Tyagaraja – kanikaramu kAntapai kaligi muddiDu vELa
janakaja nA mATa samayamani palkina (dAcukOvalenA dASarathi nIdu daya)

8) **Both utilize almost identical expressions and word constructions!**

Note usages and sentiments!

- Rámadásu – ayyayyO nEDella lIjlvunaku suKa- (Keertanam in VaraLi)
konnALLu munupucEsina puNya pApa saMGamamulacE | munigi tElucuMTigA
taruvAta dAra putrAdi mOhamula | tagili vartiMpagadA O rAma |
tella tellanaina daMtamulUDi vaNakucu | taDabaDucuMTigadA konnALLu
kaMja janaka BadrAcalapativagu ninnu | ganalEka dirigitigadA konnALLu
- **Tyagaraja – proddu poyyenu Srl rAmuni (Kriti in tODi)**
mudduga tOcu bhava sAgaramuna - munigi tElucu konnALLu
mudamuna dhana tanayAgAramulu jUci - madamu cEta konnALLu
mudi madi tappina vRddha tanamucE - mundu venuka teliyakayE konnALLu
tyAgarAja nutuDaina Srl rAmuni - tatvamu teliyakayE konnALLu

9) **Both give upadEsams/sermons ‘not to be bothered by praise or condemnation, sukham or dukkham and search for equanimity by pada-seva and sAdana..**

- Rámadásu - evaru dUShiMcina nEmivacce mari | evaru BUshiMcina nEmivacce mari
- Tyagaraja - cAla saukhyamO kashTamO nEnu- jAli jenditinA sari vArilO
pAla muncina nITa muncina - padamulE gati tyAgarAja nuta (bhuvini dAsuDanE)

10) **Both lament “I struggled birth after birth to be born again and again by running after riches and women; O Rama, how misinformed have I been and ‘lost’.**

- Rámadásu - teliyakane mOsapotini
- Tyagaraja - mOsa pOku vinavE sat-sahavAsamu viDavakE
dhana taruNulakASincuTella - venuka tanuvukalasaTE gAni
manasu cEta sEvvyuni talacitE - su-mana satvamunosagunE manasa

Something extraordinary is similar incidents, hundred years apart, that historians, have ascribed to both Ramadasu and Tyagaraja in their respective lives is as follows:

In Ramadasu's charitam, historians mention the keertanam '*Pratyakshamuganu Ee-vela bratikinchitivyaya*³⁴' as proof of the full incident in the words of Ramadasu himself; the song narrates the incident as to how the burglars, chasing Ramadasu in torrential rains, suddenly stopped pursuit and ran away as soon as Ramadasu shouted 'O Rama'; Ramadasu goes on in the song to praise Rama's compassion and protection that made him walk fearless thereafter.

While there is no specific song by Tyagaraja, narrating a similar experience, his kriti "*mundu venuka(y)iru pakkala tODai*" is explained by upanyâsakAs with an anecdote in Tyagaraja's life:

Tyagaraja swami was returning from a kshetrâDanam to Tirupati, unaware that the patron who hosted Swami and his disciples in Tirupati had stacked, under the palanquin, secretly, a bag of jewelry and gold coins (as a mark of respect for the saint). On the way, a few bandits posing as palanquin bearers joined the entourage. However, noticing and unnerved by two robust soldier-like servants guarding the palanquin front and back with torches and swords, the bandits abandoned their plot and apologized to the saint and his disciples confessing their blunder. The astonished Tyagaraja looked around and was disappointed that he could not see the two soldiers. His disciples and followers who recorded the life events have informed the later year historians this anecdote with direct reference to the song mentioned above.

Many of the devotees, music fans and admirers believe that Tyagaraja was an incarnation of Ramadasu.

Epilougue :

'Pada-kavitâ-Pitâmaha' Annamayya (1408-1503) started the Sankeertana Sampradâyam with tens of thousands of keertanams most of which survived to date; Saints Vyasaraaya, Vadiraja and Sangita-Pitâmaha Purandara dasa and all their disciples showered mankind with more keertanams soaked in music and bhakti. Sadâsiva BrahmêndrâL, Narayana teertha , Satguru Bodendra swamigal and Sridhara AiyâvâL followed in their footsteps. Sri Ramadasu popularized the keertana-form at a different level where ordinary people could enjoy the various emotions including 'Nindâ-stuti', 'Vipralambha-bhâva', 'Sakhya' and 'storytelling' through folk style songs especially of the greatest of epics, Ramayana. His praise and pleas to Sitamma to recommend to Sri Rama for deliverance and his final surrender to Sri Rama attracted Saint Tyagaraja to his style and content of Ramadasu sankeertanams (as we saw elsewhere in this article) and millions of Srivaishnavaites from the southern continent as fitting parallel to the Saranâgati upâyam often highlighted by the Azwars.

When Sri Ramadasu left his mortal body to be one with the Lord in 1680, his sankeertanams may have been popular amongst a few thousands in and around Bhadrâchalam; but the extensive appreciation and popularity among a wider audience (geographically and linguistically) did not happen until Saint Tyagaraja (1767-1847) extolled Ramadasu through obeisance and his own compositions. Concurrently, the greatest of Sankeertana Acharyas, Sri Marudanallur Satguru Swamigal (1777-1817) established the 'dakshiNa-bhArata-prAcheena-bhajana Sampradâyam (aka Sankeertana Sampradâyam) with most of Sri Ramadasu keertanams along with compositions of all the earlier saints in classical style and renditions.

While there is always a contest as to the 'original ragas' used by Ramadasu, it is generally believed that in the absence of any work that was published in the 18th century, whatever historians wrote

³⁴ *Satyamunatvamu neevEnA, deivamu sadaya Ramachandra! Jammanu cheekatiO vaana-jara-jarakuriyakanu Immaku sommula nimmanikatthini krumma talapagAnu, sommaSinnucunu, naacittumu Solasi JaLLu managA Nammatakina nAdeivamu neevani, namminandukipuDu....*

as the stated tunes (ragams) for specific songs were termed the 'original ragams'. Thanks to Sankeertana Sampradáyam (17c-18c) most of Ramadasu's compositions were classified with specific ragams and most of them are still sung in the very same ragams and talams.

The greatest credit in popularizing Ramadasu keertanams would go to (late) Mahavidwans Sri Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna and Sri Nedanuri Krishnamurthy. There are about 40 keertanams by Balamuralikrishna-garu in compact discs and digital version freely available for download from the Internet and another 40 more from the cassettes from the 1970s and 1980s. There are many jukeboxes of his (Ramadasu-keertanam) recordings on the YouTube for great listening pleasure and easy learning.

Sri Krishnamurthy-garu (and his worthy disciples, Malladi brothers, Smt. Seshulatha Kosuru and Smt. Neeta Chandrasekhar) went one step further, doing a yeoman service by publishing (a) authentic digital documentation of lyrics in Telugu and English, (b) swara notations by the great guru, and (c) digital audio tracks of Sri Krishnamurthy-garu singing solo or teaching to Malladi brothers in Gurukula style so that interested music students and devotees can easily learn by listening and singing along with notations and those audio recordings. There are 108 such tracks and with documentation at this link: <http://bhadrachalaramadasu.com/ramadasu-nkm-108-keerthanalu/>

Many senior vidwans of the 20th century and famous musicians of the current era are continuing this great service by conducting annual 'Ramadasa Jayanti' and releasing many Compact discs and digital music. Sankeertana vidwans and Bhágavatas do yeomen service

in popularizing even the lesser known keertanams through regular sankeertanams and divya-dampati-viváhams. In all, more than 130 keertanams have been frequently sung. There are other publications in Telugu, Tamiz and also Devanagari script and English transliterations of Ramadasu keertanams on the Internet.

Over the last forty years, the younger generation in India as well as those living abroad have shown enormous interest in learning and mastering the two classical systems of Indian Music. The vast majority of that number, estimated to be around one million, are students of Karnataka-Sangitam or the various dance forms of India. While many of the students of music are familiar with Saint Tyagaraja and his compositions, only a small fraction seem to be aware that Saint Tyagaraja was inspired by Sri Ramadasu and many of his compositions are a result of Tyagaraja's immense admiration, understanding and followership of Bhadráchala Rámadasu and his compositions. It is therefore the duty of the thousands of music teachers in India and abroad to study the life and compositions of Sri Ramadasu and teach them to their students alongside Tyagaraja's compositions.

Who will not melt when they hear these timeless compositions?

*Nanu brovamani ceppave Sitamma talli in mellifluous Kalyani,
RamabhadrA rArA Sri Ramacandra rArA, or,
Paluke bangArA mAyenain soft flowing Ananda bhairavi*



Thiruvaiyaru Krishnan

