

THE SONG OF THE SAINTS

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The music of Thyagaraja and Deekshitar represents the quintessence of the culture and religion of our ancient land. It is not only a hallowed legacy but a living fire animating the hearts and minds, stimulating and guiding the thoughts and actions of succeeding generations in a complex changing world.

These twin streams of musical compositions spring from the same eternal source—human emotion at its exalted intensity—and they reach out for the same objective—to merge and mingle with universal divinity. The outpourings of these two inspired minds however differ in tempo, rhythm and style and offer a fascinating study in comparison and contrast.

To Thyagaraja, divinity is personified in Sri Rama whom he loved with passion and affection, essentially human, but so intense that they could be enshrined only in the eternal language of music. Every outward expression of the human emotion of love—entreaty, appealing, chiding, weeping, coaxing, cuddling praising, and worshipping—is imbedded in immortal song. He appeals to Rama to appear before him in resplendent glory to the lilting tune of *Hechirigarara Sri Ramachandra* in *Yadukula Kambodhi*, to respond with unconcealed ardour in *O' Rangasaye O' Anuchurave* in *Kambodhi*, to bestow his benign generosity in *Brova Bharama* in *Bahudari*. He loves Rama with the fervent human desire for sensual contact as he sings *Chetulara Sringaramu Chesichuthunu* in *Bhairavi*. His devotion is that of a fond child towards a doting parent in *Seethamma Mayamma* set in *Vasanth* and in *Ma Janaki* in *Kambodhi*. His affection assumes the form of surrender in *Pattividuvaradhu* in *Manjari*. He was aware that a devotee could not aspire for the love of Rama unless he qualified himself by contemplation and conduct. In *Rama Neeveda* in

Karaharapriya, he speaks of the impossibility of obtaining milk from a male tiger even it had assumed the external form of a cow. As a disappointed lover he would get annoyed and indulge in *'Ninda Sthuthi'* which is only a measure of his boundless affection. For he could chide his Lord only in the heavenly strains of *Hamir Kalyani*—*'Manamuledha Thanavadani Nikabhimanamuledha'*. Even his taunts are set in the sonorous splendour of *Sankarabharana* in *'Yethuta Nilachite Needu Sommulu Emi Podura'*. He enters into close conversation with the Lord and heckles him by drawing his attention to incidents when the Lord had bestowed his affections on persons less devoted to him—*'Satrula Mithrula Samamuga Chuche Nee Kendhuku Nirdaya'* in *Harikambodhi*.

Thyagaraja thought of the benediction of Rama as a salvation from the bonds and miseries of human life. He exhorted human beings not to be tempted by ephemeral pleasures in *'Nithi Chala Sukama Ramuni Sannadhi Chala Sukama'*, in mellifluous *Kalyani*. Wealth and all the appurtenances of human vanity shrink to little measure before the effulgence of the Lord. He was intensely aware of the influences that distract the human mind from supreme felicity. Frequently we find references to *'Kanthala Bhrama'* and *'Kantha Chintha krantulu'*, of human hearts enmeshed in sensuous pleasure. He set aside anything that would obscure an unhindered vision of the greatness of Rama as in the magnificent compositions *'Chakkani Rajamargam'ulu* in *Karaharapriya* and *'M-nasu Swadheenamaina narunaku'* in *Sankarabaranam* Thyagaraja's knowledge of human nature from its lowest depth to the highest pinnacle of exaltation is as intimate and intense as that of Shakespeare. His metaphors and analogies are drawn so much from human experience that we can always find a one to one correspondence

between them and Shakespearean diction. The entire spirit of Othello is just imbedded in a single line of that famous song in Kambodhi 'Evarimata Vinnavo'. He expresses disgust at the baser human emotions that sour the fount of human life. He speaks of the despair of one who is constrained to praise a born miser even as Shakespeare codemns ingratitude as a marble-hearted fiend.

While listening to Thyagaraja we yearn for the presence of God as a human companion a loving mother, a generous father, a laughing child, a loyal friend and a thoughtful guide. The compositions of Deekshitar make us feel that we are worshipping in reverent awe inside the sacred altar of an ageless temple. To Deekshitar, Godly presence is transcendent, far beyond the utmost bounds of human thought and feeling. He contemplates God as one would contemplate the peaks of unattainable mountains or the distant stars and the universe beyond. His view of the Almighty is Miltonic-illimitable, without bound, without dimension where length, breadth and height, time and place are lost.

There is no room for reference to human frailties. There is no necessity to warn or comfort. It is just contemplation of the Supreme as the sweet sensations of sound transport us to a universe transcending thought and feeling. The object of worship is set in a shower of gold, its beauty too rich for familiarity, its charm lifting us to wild ecstasy by the very contemplation of it.

Is there any one amongst us who is not thrilled to sublime reverence as he hears 'Sri Subramanyaya Namasthe' vibrating with the majestic march of the raga Kambodhi. The vision of the king of kings in beatific splendour bursts before human eyes as the raga Sankarabarana mounts to a crescendo in 'Akshaya Linga vibo, Akilanda Koti Prabho'. The mighty orb of music round the Navagrahas emphasise the ultra mundane nature of his compositions. The human ear attains divine perception as it receives the felicitous strains of Kalyani in 'Kamalambam Bajares'. A strange invisible enchantment hits our

senses and we are imparadised in a bourne of bliss as the raga Kalyani with its voluptuous swell sweeps into the charanam 'Nirvana Nija sukha pradayini nitya kalyani kathyayini'.

No human lips could have paid their homage to the vision of beauty in sweeter song than 'Menakshimemudam' in Poorvikalyani. In every song, in every line, and in every word it is always the imperial theme—the glory and omniscience of God swathed in the myriad splendoured hues of Hindu mythology, beloved Balakrishna in 'Chethasri' in Dvijavanthi, the flame of chastity in 'Kamalambikaye', the arbiter of human destiny in 'Venkatachalapathe'.

One wonders whether there is a divine dispensation in inspiring Thyagaraja to sing in Telugu and Deekshitar to compose in Sanskrit. The delicate nuances and the soft melodies of the Telugu language are an ideal medium to express the varying shades of human emotion. Sanskrit, the language of the Gods is the only medium to express our admiration for the transcendent beauty of divinity, too sacred for approach save by contemplation.

There are occasions in which Thyagaraja's music resounds with the same spirit of Deekshitar but then the language of Telugu is transmuted to almost Sanskritic diction in 'Meru samana dheera varada' in Mayamalgowla or 'Jagadanandaka' karaka' in Nata and 'Niravadhisukhada' in Ravichandrika.

What divine visitation is it that these saints should have been born in the same country, walked the same domain in the same period propagating the wonder of God on 'earth's human shores'. Their compositions represent just two versions of the same religion, the same high purpose of understanding the ways of God, the same task of comprehending the all pervasive nature of space and time, the same objective of capturing the charm and magic of eternal creation.

The song of the saints is the gift of Gods to man on earth.

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Souvenir of Nadopasana, Madras.