

## **Evolution of Carnatic music- a series**

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, at the outset, I would like to wish you all a Very Happy Prosperous and Musical 2011! We begin the new year by continuing our journey of the evolution of Carnatic music and studying the *Bhakti* movement in South India. The start of the new year provides an ideal opportunity to pay homage to one of the greatest saints of Carnatic music viz. Purandara Dasa. In today's column, we will look at the life of Purandara Dasa; next month we will look in detail at his contributions to Carnatic music.

Purandara Dasa (1484-1564) was one of the most famous proponents of the Haridasa movement. He is regarded as '*Sangita Pitamaha*' or the Father of Carnatic music for his invaluable contributions. Purandara Dasa was born as Srinivasa Nayaka into a wealth merchant family. After losing his parents, Srinivasa Nayaka inherited his father's business and became very rich; unfortunately he was also very miserly. In contrast, his wife was an extremely pious and generous lady. One of the most famous stories associated with Srinivasa Nayaka is his transformation from a person who loved material wealth to a *dasa* (literally a slave to the Lord).

The story goes that Srinivasa Nayaka was a moneylender and an extremely greedy one at that. The Lord appeared before him in the form of a poor Brahmin and requested money to perform his son's thread ceremony. After ignoring the Brahmin for 6 months, Nayaka gave him some useless coins to get rid of him. The Brahmin went to Nayaka's wife, recounted the incident to her and requested her to lend him some money. She gave him her diamond nose-ring which had been given to her by her parents and for which she did not require her husband's permission. The Brahmin went back to Nayaka and sold him the nose-ring! Nayaka recognized the nose-ring as belonging to his wife; so he hurried home and asked her for it. His wife knew that Nayaka would punish her if she told him the truth; instead she decided to kill herself by drinking poison in front of the idol of Lord Krishna. At that instant, the nose-ring dropped into the bowl of poison and she took it back to her husband. Nayaka ran back to the store and found that the locked box in which he had placed the Brahmin's nose-ring was now empty! Nayaka realized then that the Brahmin was none other than the Lord. He gave away all his riches and started the life of a wandering saint composing devotional songs. At some point of time, he became a disciple of the sage Vyasraya who bestowed on him the name 'Purandara Dasa'.

Till we meet next time, do continue listening to *devaranamas* of the different *Bhakti* saints such as Purandara Dasa, Vyasraya among others.

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