

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the past few columns, we have been looking at the evolution of Carnatic music and how different social factors have influenced Carnatic music into the form that we know today. Having discussed the *Bhakti* movement in North India and its influence on Carnatic music, this time, we will look at the *Bhakti* movement in South India.

The *Bhakti* movement in South India was characterized by devotion centered on either of the Gods- *Vishnu* or *Shiva*. The main proponents of this movement were the *Haridasas*, many of whom were wandering bards and considered themselves 'slaves' to the Lord. Of these saints, Purandara Dasa is perhaps the most famous of the bhaktas. He is regarded as '*Sangita Pitamaha*' or the father of Carnatic music for his numerous invaluable contributions. Purandara Dasa laid the foundation for systematic leaning in Carnatic music- students of Carnatic music to this day follow the structure that he set up.

The composer saints Sripadaraya, Vyasaraaya, Vadiraja, Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa, Vijayadasa, Gopaladasa and Jagannathadasa were among those who spearheaded the Bhakti movement. They composed numerous songs or *devaranamas* in Kannada that were easy for the common man to understand. While their compositions expounded the philosophy of devotion, at other times, the compositions were satirical in nature mocking the state of society at that time. In essence, they tried to reform society through the medium of music. *Devaranamas* are widely included in Carnatic music concerts; while some *devaranamas* are sung as 'filler' presentations, at other times a *devaranama* is the main presentation in a concert, complete with the aspects of *manodharma* (improvisation). In Karnataka, *deveranama* concerts are popularly presented on many concert platforms.

Vyasaraya (1460-1539) was a highly accomplished scholar and very influential in the Vijayanagar empire of Sri Krishnadevaraya. He composed many beautiful *devaranamas* in Kannada. Both of the most well known *Bhakti* saints Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa were disciples of Vyasaraya.. By accepting Kanaka Dasa, who belonged to a lower-caste, as his disciple, Vyasaraya showed his disregard for the practice of caste system.

Till we meet next time, do try and listen to some *devaranamas* online. Perhaps the famous composition of Vyasaraya is "*Krishna Nee Begane Baaro*" sung in *Raga Yaman Kalyani*- almost every professional singer has presented this beautiful song on the concert platform.

Here's wishing you all a Happy 2011!

.
*Smitha Prasad is a Carnatic vocalist based in Cary, NC and can be reached at
smitha_prasad@hotmail.com*