

## Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, this month we continue to pay homage to Purandara Dasa, one of the great saints of Carnatic music. In last month's column, we looked at the remarkable transformation of the rich and miserly merchant Srinivasa Nayaka into the wandering bard Purandara Dasa; this month we look at the numerous contributions he made to Carnatic music as well as the various facets of his compositions.

Purandara Dasa was one of the most famous exponents of the Haridasa movement, which was a part of the larger *Bhakti* movement. The *Bhakti* movement advocated doing away with the practices of caste system and ritualistic worship and instead advocated a life of devotion to God in a simple manner. In line with this thought, the *Bhakti* saints, including Purandara Dasa, composed verses, which were simple enough to be understood by the common man. Often in colloquial languages, the public easily understood these songs even if they had not had any formal education.

Purandara Dasa composed numerous *devaranamas* in Kannada. While many of the *krithis* were devotional in nature and exuded *Bhakti* (devotion), other *krithis* exuded common sense and a philosophical approach to life. Yet other *krithis* were satirical in nature and commented (and sometimes lamented!) on the state of society at that point in time. One of his compositions reads:

*Nageyu baruththide yenage, Jagadoliruva manujarella hagarana maduvuda kandu*  
I laugh (satirical) looking at the confusion of people around me

He goes on to describe various real-life ironic situations, which give an insight into what society may have faced at that point in time. The recurring theme in all his compositions is surrender to Lord *Vittala* of Pandarapura.

Purandara Dasa is regarded as '*Sangeetha Pitamaha*' or Father of Carnatic music. Besides his various compositions (close to 500,000) he also systematized the way Carnatic music was taught to students with a series of exercises that are followed to this day. These exercises introduced basic concepts and showcased more advanced concepts as the students progressed. The late musician M. L. Vasanthakumari (MLV) popularized Purandara Dasa *devaranamas* and these were often mainstays in her concert presentations.

Till we meet next time, do listen to Purandara Dasa *devaranamas*; you can find many beautiful renditions by MLV and other vocalists online.

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