

## Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, in this month's column, we will look at yet another of the famous *Bhakti* saints- Kanakadasa. Along with Purandara Dasa, Kanaka Dasa also belonged to the tradition of the *Haridasa* movement and became a disciple of Vyasaraaya. The exponents of the *Haridasa* movement believed themselves to be 'servants of *Hari*'. True to the tenets of the *Bhakti* movement, Kanakadasa also preached a life of simplicity filled with kindness and equanimity.

Kanaka Dasa (1509-1609) was born as part of the Kuruba community. The story goes that at some point of time, he gave up being a warrior and devoted his life to composing songs and philosophical works. He advocated doing away with the practice of caste distinction and instead advised a path of *Bhakti* or devotion to God. Like Purandara Dasa, Kanakadasa's compositions were in Kannada since the main intent of the *Haridasa* movement and the *Bhakti* movement in general was to take devotional philosophy to the common man.

There are a number of interesting stories involving Kanakadasa. On one occasion, guru Vyasaraaya held a debate to discuss who could attain *Moksha* (salvation). A number of learned *pandits* present answered that someone who was a Brahmin or someone who had learned the *Vedas* would attain *moksha*. When asked the same question, Kanakadasa replied that none of the assembled people would attain salvation; instead he uttered the famous phrase:

“Naanu hodare hodenu”

Literally translated, this means, “I will attain salvation”. This angered all the assembled *pandits* who mocked Kanakadasa for his ignorance; others mocked his ego. Kanakadasa then explained that only one who had lost the ‘Self’ (ego) was capable of attaining salvation. The *pandits* thus realized that despite his simplistic appearance, Kanakadasa was extremely scholarly.

There is a beautiful film in Kannada titled ‘*Bhakta Kanakadasa*’ in which Dr. Rajkumar plays the lead role of Kanakadasa. The film highlights the life and famous compositions of Kanakadasa. Despite the film being black and white, Dr. Rajkumar has exquisitely portrayed the various emotions and challenges faced by Kanaka dasa.

Till we meet next time, do watch some clips of the movie “*Bhakta Kanakadasa*” on Youtube- many of the clips have English subtitles, which should help you understand the situation.

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