



Uniqueness of Bhakti Tradition in Andhra

Selflessness and surrender to God have been the hallmarks of great poets of the region

The Andhra or Telugu *bhakti* tradition, known as *madhurabhakti*-sweet devotion, of poets, composers and saints - has enriched literature and culture for over a thousand years.

Pothana, the great author of *Andhra Maha Bhagavatam*, was the first great poet to spurn royal patronage, sending out the message that a literary work was an offering at the altar of the Supreme needing no royal support or human intervention.

Bhadrachala Ramadas who built the famous Bhadradi shrine for which he suffered years of incarceration and cruel punishment, prayed for mercy only to his Lord and the Divine Mother through his soulful *keertanalu*.

Another great soul Thyagaraja rejected the king's offer of wealth and public honour to protect the

purity of his pursuit and sanctity of his immortal and universally popular *kritis*.

Dedication to Society

It is aptly summed up that Pothana the poet, Annamayya, Kshetrappa, Ramadas and Thyagaraja, saint-composers and ardent devotees, were also benefactors of the society in which they lived. Seeking salvation, *moksha*, through their creative work was not their only goal. They always had people's well being in their minds and wrote several compositions to awaken the people, the poor and the illiterate also, to the reality and purpose of human life.

That they sought neither wealth nor pomp and power has been another endearing feature of their immortal compositions.

As American professor and musicologist William Jackson

wrote "Ramadas, Pothana and Tyagaraja are considered to be three Telugu *bhaktas* who made crucial conscientious choices against panegyrics and for devotional lyrics. The three are the real kings who have held sway over the kingdom of devotion in Andhra literature as distinct from the rust kings, moth kings and robber kings whose pomp is ephemeral."

These splendid 'kings' without crowns (*makutamuleni maharajulu*) have shone on our firmament. Potha *raju* blessed by Rama and ordained by him to write the *Bhagavatamu* in Telugu, while Tyaga *raju* attained *siddhi* by chanting the Rama *mantra* while singing in ecstasy on Rama's qualities of head and heart. Gopa *raju* (Ramadas) worshipped Rama at Bhadradi with utmost devotion, singing his glory all the time and gave us a treasure in the form of *Dasaradhi Satakamu*. In the Empire of Rama *bhakti*, all the three are the true kings!

Spirit of Independence

Interestingly, the Telugu *bhakti* tradition has also instilled in the minds of the Telugu speaking people a revolutionary fervour

and a spirit of defiance and dissent. Pothana's town Orugallu, now Warangal in Telengana, emerged as a 'citadel of protest and centre of dissent.' In the dense forest region around the town of Bhadrachalam where Ramadas raised the beautiful shrine is where the legendary freedom fighter Alluri Seetharamaraju sacrificed his life leading a revolt against the British government.

The compositions of Annamaya, Ramadas and Tyagaraja are sung/heard in almost every home in South India and in many distant lands. As Veena maestro the late Sri Chittibabu once remarked, "the saint-composers who enriched our culture with their *kritis*, *kirtanas* and writings led a selfless life of utmost austerity. Musicians, at least some of them, who sing or make instrumental presentations of those great compositions earn fame, awards and wealth and live in comfort. No homage is too great for the great saint-composers!"

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